

NEW WAYS TO CONNECT AT THANKSGIVING (AND BEYOND)



Food

Our Family of the Month generously shares their recipe for Navajo frybread!



Fun

Thanksgiving is a great opportunity to try some new table games, like “Top Four!”



Conversation

Keep conversation meaningful with our conversation starters for a welcoming table.



Five Conversation Starters for a Welcoming Table

On Thanksgiving, or any day!

- 1 Tell me something about yourself that you think I may not know.
- 2 What makes you feel cared for? What is the most caring thing someone has ever done for you?
- 3 What was a favorite toy or game from your childhood that you hope will be played by the next generation? Why was it special to you?
- 4 Imagine people are speaking of you 100 years from now. What do you hope they will say?
- 5 What's the craziest gift you ever received?

Family dinners are important every day, but we have to admit that there are some family dinners that get more attention than others. Thanksgiving tends to top the list of scene-stealing meals — after all, it’s a holiday that centers on the tradition of feasting with family and friends. It’s also the kick-off to the entire holiday season, when many of us will be spending more time enjoying food, fun and conversation with loved ones than we do at any other time of year. So how can we be sure to make Thanksgiving dinner, and the celebrations that follow, meaningful and rewarding for all?

- **It’s not about the food (but it’s a little bit about the food).** Sure, the food tends to be the main focus of planning the celebrations, but what makes Thanksgiving truly a day of “thanks and giving” is the way we choose to connect with the people around the table. Get conversation starters, tips for taming technology at the holiday table, activity ideas and more ways to keep the focus on family and friends at our Thanksgiving hub. There are some recipes, too — because let’s face it, it’s a little bit about the food.
- **Still, there are a lot of people to feed during the holiday season.** That’s one reason we included a chapter called “There’s Too Big a Crowd!” in our new book, *Eat, Laugh, Talk: The Family Dinner Playbook*. Besides recipes for buffet-ready crowd pleasers like mostaccioli and pulled pork, we offer games and conversation ideas to help make newer dinner guests feel comfortable, keep little ones engaged and get the laughter flowing.
- **But the holiday season is also about giving.** Yes, giving (and thanks!) should be high on the priority list at this time of year, especially gifts of our presence, time and service to others. As we do every year, The Family Dinner Project invites you and your family to celebrate Giving Tuesday with us. You can take part simply by visiting our *Giving Tuesday resources* and using some of the ideas to spark conversations about thanks and giving at your family dinner.
- **And it’s also about making everyone feel welcome.** With big gatherings come wonderful opportunities to make memories — as well as the possibility of some conflict, especially when extended family members and guests don’t share the same views on topics like politics. If you’re wondering how to make the dinner table a welcoming space despite diverse points of view, check out Dr. Anne Fishel’s 2016 article on the *Politics of Thanksgiving*, as relevant now as it was then.



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There's no doubt that Thanksgiving and the following season can bring feelings of stress as you plan and organize for your celebrations, but this is also an annual opportunity to slow down and remember what family meals are all about: Food, fun and conversation about things that matter, with the people who matter to you. The Family Dinner Project Team wishes you and your loved ones a happy season of thanks and giving!

WHEN I THINK OF FAMILY DINNER, I THINK OF...

How would you finish that sentence?

With a memory about a favorite food? A funny story about a dinner disaster? Some sweet moment that brings a smile to your face years after it happened? We want to hear from you! Share your "When I think of family dinner..." answers in a quick video on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram between November 7 and 17 and be entered to win a copy of Eat, Laugh, Talk: The Family Dinner Playbook.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE:

- Snap a photo or shoot a short (60 seconds or less!) video on your smartphone, responding to the prompt "*When I think about family dinner I think of _____.*" There are no wrong answers!
- Share your captioned photo or video on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter between **November 7 and 17, 2019.**
- Make sure to use the hashtag **#eatlaughtalkbook** and tag The Family Dinner Project on Facebook ([@thefamilydinnerproject](https://www.facebook.com/thefamilydinnerproject)), Instagram ([@thefamilydinnerproject](https://www.instagram.com/thefamilydinnerproject)), or Twitter ([@fdp_tweets](https://twitter.com/fdp_tweets)).

Thank you in advance for helping us spread the word about the power of family dinners! If you have any questions, please [contact us](#).

<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/news-projects/what-does-family-dinner-mean-contest/>

REAL FAMILY DINNER PROJECTS: THE BEGAY FAMILY

Meet Tina Begay and her large extended family! Tina's dinner table includes her own children, granddaughter and her nieces and nephews as she's helping to raise them during a family crisis. We met Tina during our work with tribal communities in Montana, and are pleased to introduce her and her family to our followers!



THE FAMILY:

Tina Begay and husband Rick Desjarlais, of Arlee, Montana. Tina and Rick are joined by children Tayla, Nellie and Sage; grandchild Ruby; and nieces and nephews Horizon, Najea and Myles. The younger members of the family range from 2-year-old Ruby all the way up to 24-year-old Tayla, so Tina's family dinners include just about every age and stage imaginable!

THE GOAL:

Currently, Tina is most interested in improving the nutritional profile of family dinners in her household. She's been working making healthier meals for a long time.

“When I was first married, I cooked Hamburger Helper and canned corn. Sometimes I would change it up and have canned beans,” she says with a laugh, adding “I have come a LONG way from that person! Now I make most of my meals with fresh food, and 80% unprocessed.”

While Tina is proud of how well she's done, she's still trying to cut back on take-out meals. At the moment, the family eats takeout about 3 times a month; Tina would like to reduce to once a month or less.

THE CHALLENGES:

Time is a big challenge for Tina and Rick, especially living in their rural community. The local schools run on a 4-day schedule, meaning that the days are longer than average, and many parents in the community have to commute more than 30 miles to get to work. That means that Tina can't even start to think about preparing dinner until anytime between 6 and 8 p.m. most nights.

THE STRATEGIES:

“The crockpot is my friend,” Tina jokes.

She also tries to keep the family on track by freezing fruits, vegetables and homemade meals when she’s able, and by sticking to a no-sugar rule Sunday through Wednesday. She says she bakes homemade treats for the family’s sweet tooth, but all added sugar is off-limits for those four crucial days when everyone needs to be at their best for the four-day school schedule.

THE FOOD:

The family favorite is tacos, but Tina says they also “can’t give up” a monthly treat of traditional Navajo frybread. They cook predominantly with elk meat and try to limit white flour, except in the homemade cakes, cookies, cinnamon rolls and of course, frybread that Tina makes for everyone to enjoy.

THE TAKEAWAY:

Since connecting with The Family Dinner Project, Tina and Rick have learned to let the kids participate more in prepping and playing with foods to help them stick to healthy choices.

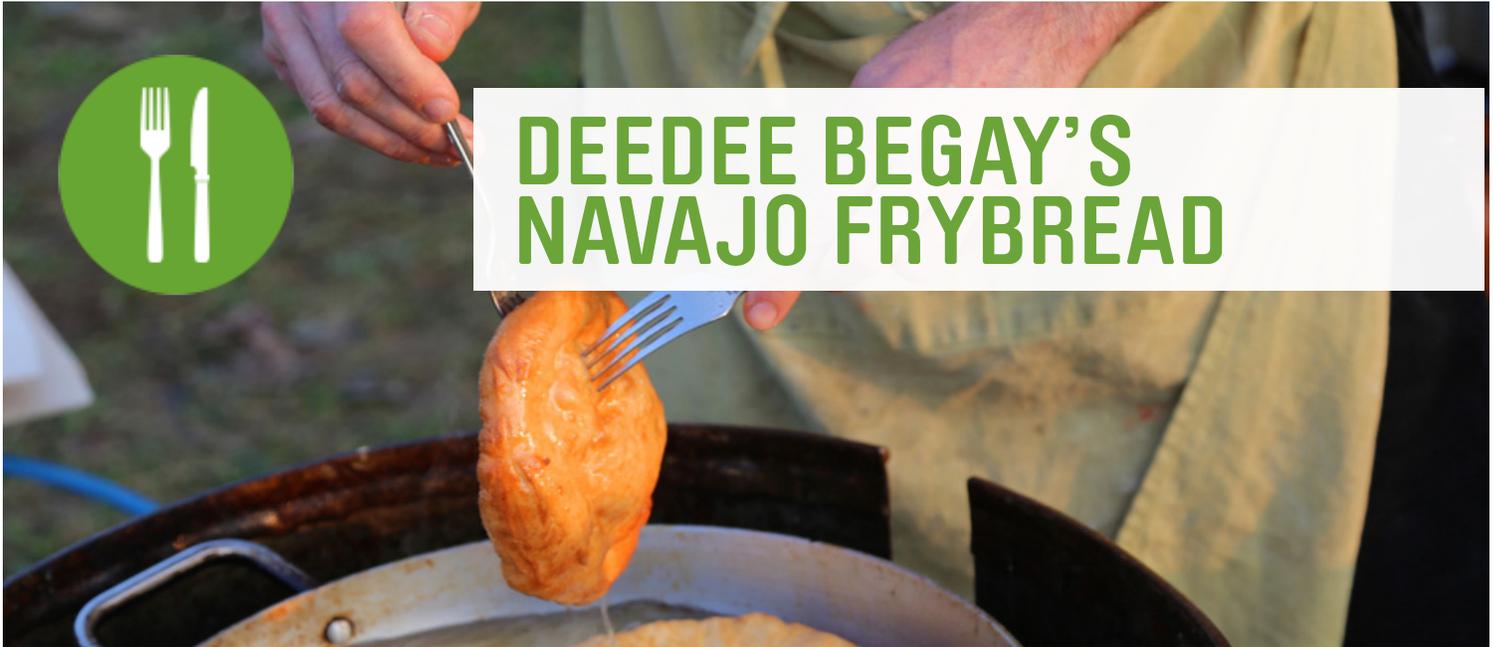
“My kids learned they actually liked red peppers!”

THE BEST PART:

“Full bellies make me happy,” Tina says, but adds that she enjoys the time to connect with the whole family at the table, which they try to make technology-free as much as possible.

In addition, the family sometimes honors their heritage (Tina is enrolled Navajo and Rick is enrolled Assiniboine, while their nieces and nephews are descendants of the CSKT tribe) at the dinner table. To help cultivate a tradition of gratitude at family dinner, they burn sage and sweet grass, and Rick prays in Assiniboine.

Do you have your own family dinner project to share with us? We’d love to hear from you and consider featuring your family! [Contact Us.](#)



DEEDEE BEGAY'S NAVAJO FRYBREAD

This recipe was shared with us by Tina Begay, whose family has roots in three different tribal communities in Montana.



Deedee Begay's Navajo Frybread

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- 8 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup baking powder
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/3 cup dry milk
- Shortening, for frying

Instructions:

1. Combine all the ingredients except shortening in a large bowl.
2. Add enough very hot water to make a sticky dough, mixing just until combined. (If you over-mix the dough, the frybread will be stiff.)
3. Melt a few tablespoons of shortening in a large skillet (cast iron works well for this) just until smoking.
4. Reduce the heat to medium. Pinch off soft-ball-sized pieces of dough and roll into balls.
5. Working with one dough ball at a time, pat the ball into a 1/2-inch thick disk. Carefully place the disk into the hot shortening and fry, turning once, until each side is golden brown.
6. Remove the frybread to a paper towel to drain and repeat the process with the remaining dough balls. Serve warm.



This Top Four guessing game is wonderful for holiday gatherings and other times when you have lots of guests at the table!

Before the meal starts, every guest is given at least four slips of paper. Each person writes a phrase or item on each slip (for example, “Clean Sheets,” “Snakes,” “The Grateful Dead,” “Remembering a word you forgot”). The slips all go into a jar that’s placed in the middle of the table.

At dinner, one person starts as the leader. The leader randomly draws four slips of paper from the jar and reads them aloud. Then the leader privately puts the slips in order of their personal preference, from most favorite to least. At the same time, the other guests write down the order in which they think the leader would rank things.

When everyone is ready, the leader reads their list aloud, and anyone who has guessed the leader’s list order correctly gets a point! Now the game continues around the table, with each person taking a turn as leader. At the end of the game, whoever has the most points wins.

Keep the conversation meaningful (and pleasant) with these conversation starters.



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On Thanksgiving, or any day!

1

Tell me something about yourself that you think I may not know.

4

Imagine people are speaking of you 100 years from now. What do you hope they will say?

2

What makes you feel cared for? What is the most caring thing someone has ever done for you?

5

What's the craziest gift you ever received?

3

What was a favorite toy or game from your childhood that you hope will be played by the next generation? Why was it special to you?

There is more that unites us than divides us. Connect with everyone at your dinner table and find common ground with these five conversation starters.

Scan the QR Code to Sign up for our Email Newsletter



<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/newsletter/top-tips-eat-laugh-talk/>