



The Welcoming Table

Dinner games and activities for families with unique sensory, behavioral, emotional and communication needs



DINNER GAMES

5,4,3,2,1 ACTIVITY

Each family member takes turns naming:

- 5 things they can see
- 4 things they can touch
- 3 things they can hear
- 2 things they can smell
- 1 thing they can taste OR 1 thing they'd like to eat right now

For an extra boost of calm, try encouraging family members to take one slow, deep breath before sharing; speaking in a whisper; or sitting as still as possible while they share.





DINNER GAMES

Humming Bee Breathing

- Take turns closing your eyes and plugging your ears
- Inhale through your nose, and quietly hum an “mmm” sound as you exhale, trying to sound like a humming bee.
- Feel the vibrations in your head! Try placing your hands gently on the places where the vibrations are strongest.
- When one person is done with their humming exhale, they can open their eyes and offer the next turn to someone else.
- See what happens when you try humming different tones. Go higher or lower. Do the vibrations change? What else is different?
- After each person has had a few turns, talk about your humming bee breaths. Which sounds and exhales were the most calming?





DINNER GAMES

DRAWING MUSIC

- Give each person a piece of paper and some colored pencils or crayons.
- Play a piece of music — preferably one that everyone enjoys!
- Challenge each person to draw along with the music, without lifting the crayon or pencil from the paper. The goal is to watch your own hands flow along with the music.
- When the music ends, stop drawing and share your creations. Notice how they're similar and how they're different!





DINNER GAMES

FOOD DETECTIVE

- Set up a “detective’s office” area. You’ll need a place to set out the food, plus lots of different “tools” your detective will use to help investigate.
- Ask your detective to investigate the food you’ve chosen and record their answers to the following questions (or any others you might think of!):
 - What color is the food?
 - How big is it, and/or how much does it weigh?
 - What does it feel like to touch this food? Is it smooth, rough, squishy, dry, wet...?
 - Does it have a smell? Can you describe it?
 - Try to push this food across the table to the other end. Measure how far it goes.
- Now add an extra challenge for your detective! Ask them to share their notes and findings with another family member who wasn’t present for the activity. Can the other person guess what food they were investigating just by reading the notes?





DINNER GAMES

SENSORY CENTER

- Letters and Numbers. Fill a large rimmed tray with a thick, smearable food like pudding, yogurt, applesauce, or mashed potatoes. Have your child trace letters and numbers into the food using their fingers. For a dry experience, you could try flour or cornmeal for tracing.
- Map Maker. Starting with a tray of smearable food, gather small toys and vehicles that can fit inside the tray. Build a “map” together, then use the vehicles to drive along different routes. (“This is our house, and that is the store. Let’s drive the truck to the store!”)
- Buried Treasure. Fill a bowl or deep tray with food as outlined above. Hide small objects like little toys or coins inside the food and have the child use their hands to dig for the objects.
- Pasta Picasso. Cook and cool some spaghetti or other long pasta shape. Let kids make pasta “artwork” or write messages by bending and twisting the cooked pasta into shapes.





DINNER GAMES

BEET TATTOOS

1. Rinse the beets to remove any dirt.
2. Cut beets in half crosswise (around the equator).
Leave roots and stems attached for easy holding.
3. Place the beets cut-side-down in boiling water for 4-5 minutes, just until the bottoms are fork-tender.
Cool until they can be easily handled.
4. Push a simple cookie cutter shape into the cut sides of the beets. Stars or hearts work well.
5. Remove the cookie cutter. Use a small paring knife to remove the excess beet around the imprint of the shape. Now you have a beet stamp in your desired shape!
6. Lick the stamp, then press the beets onto clean skin and hold for a few seconds. Remove and let dry.
The imprint will darken slightly as it dries, in a minute or two.
7. Now you have a pink “tattoo!”





DINNER GAMES

DINK DINK DUNK

Everyone sits in a circle on the ground. One person is the “picker” and walks around the circle tapping people gently on the head, saying “Dink...dink...dink...”

The picker carries a full (small) cup of water! When they get tired of saying “dink,” they “dunk” the next person by saying “DUNK!” and pouring the water on them. The person who got dunked then has to jump up and chase the picker around the circle until they either tag the picker, or the picker gets back to their own empty seat and sits down.

If the picker is tagged before safely reaching their spot, they refill the cup and continue as the picker for the next round. If they’re safe, the person who was dunked and chased them fills the cup and becomes the next picker.





DINNER GAMES

WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH...?

This is a great creative game to play outdoors! Set out a small collection of basic toys or objects. Good examples include a hula hoop, a playground ball, a bucket or pail, and a Frisbee.

Now challenge your family: “What can you do with the...hula hoop?” Let each person take a turn thinking of a way to use the hula hoop, from the basic to the absurd (“I can balance the hula hoop on my nose!”). Then try finding a new way to use the hula hoop with two people, then three, and so on until the whole family is involved.

Repeat the game with each item you’ve got, and see how many silly and fun ways you can come up with to use these common objects!





DINNER GAMES

BLINDFOLDED SMELL TEST

Set up small jars with cinnamon, lemon, toothpaste, banana, other spices in your kitchen, yogurt and/or whatever else you have on hand.

Blindfold your family members and have them guess the ingredients!





DINNER GAMES

COOKIE FACE RACE

This hilarious cookie face race challenge doesn't have to be played with cookies — any flat-bottomed food item, like crackers, bread, slices of cheese or dried fruit strips, can work!

Each player tips his or her head back. Place a cookie (or other chosen food item) on each person's forehead. Set a timer for one minute and say "On your mark, get set, go!" See who can get the cookie from their forehead to their mouth first — but no hands! Players can only use their facial muscles to move their cookies.





DINNER GAMES

DIFFERENT DRUMMERS

Pick one person to be the leader. The Leader begins tapping a beat on the table (or clapping). The others around the table begin tapping or clapping along with the Leader. The Leader can change the beat whenever they choose, and everyone else must follow suit. Then, without warning, the Leader stops drumming. The last person to stop drumming is out.

senses

feel

taste

look

hear

smell



DINNER GAMES

USE YOUR SENSES

Try this sense-ational game!

Close your eyes, and ask your family,
“What do you hear? What do you smell?”

For some guaranteed giggles, encourage
your family to imitate the sounds they
hear.



DINNER GAMES

GUESS THE EMOTION

Have one person leave the table for a minute. Once she leaves, the rest of the family decides on an emotion. When the missing family member returns to the table, the rest of the family eats and acts with that feeling in mind. For example, if the emotion is “worry,” someone might say “I have so much homework tonight I’m never going to get to sleep.”

You can make it a bit more challenging for older kids by allowing only body language and facial expression to convey emotion, or even just facial expression alone.





DINNER GAMES

MAKE WHIPPED CREAM

If you like the idea of making something out of nothing, then you'll enjoy this recipe.

Place whipping cream in a tightly covered container (test the tightness of the lid first, to prevent wardrobe disasters). Then, you shake the daylights out of it. You can put on music and dance with it. Pass it from person to person and do the hokey pokey if you like!

When you're done, the cream thickens to become whipped cream. Save it for dessert...if you can resist.





DINNER GAMES

PLAY DOUGH

Kids love to make concoctions from leftover food and cleaning supplies. These unexpected chemical reactions create bubbling, strange aromas and weird colors that are dramatic and require careful vigilance so your kids don't try to eat or drink these brews.

Play dough is simple and fun to make. Just combine two cups flour, 1 cup salt, 2 cups water, 4 teaspoons cream of tartar, 2 tablespoons oil and food coloring. Mix and stir constantly over very low heat until a ball forms. Then play with your dough!





DINNER GAMES

PRETZEL PLAY

Doughs of many kinds can be plied and twisted into recognizable shapes, and it's fun for kids to get their hands goopy and sticky.

In your own kitchen, your kids can go wild molding the dough into different shapes. While bread usually requires patience to wait for, rising pretzels provide much quicker gratification.

Get the recipe here!

<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/food/pretzels/>





DINNER GAMES

ROLL THE ORANGE

- Place an orange (or a small ball) in the center of the table.
 - Choose one person — Person A — to begin the conversation.
 - Person A draws a conversation starter from the jar, or uses the “start the conversation” button on a device.
 - Person A reads the conversation starter aloud, then takes the orange and gently rolls it to someone else at the table.
 - The person who gets the orange has the first turn to answer the question. That person holds the orange until they’re done speaking, then gently rolls the orange to someone else.
 - Continue rolling the orange to different family members until everyone has had a turn.
- Remember: If you’re not holding the orange, it’s not your chance to answer!





DINNER GAMES

CHARADES

One person is the actor and the others are guessers. The actor has to act out a word or phrase without speaking. You can let each actor think of their own words, or have a list of ideas ready.

When they're ready, the actor holds up their fingers to show how many words are in the correct answer. Then they act out the word or phrase they've chosen. The first person to guess correctly gets to act next!

To make your round of Charades more fun, you can agree on a category first, like "book titles," "movies" or "animals." Or you can get really creative and play Charades about family memories, with each person acting out a memorable moment!





DINNER GAMES

X MARKS THE SPOT

- The first rule is for the family adults to get rid of the idea that everyone has to sit at the table.
- Once you've decided that some family members can choose to stand at mealtimes, to help with their motor needs, it's time to start marking spots!
- We recommend using colored painter's tape to mark your spots. You can vary this idea by placing small yoga mats, area rugs, or even a hula hoop.
- Place a large "X" or create a box or circle on the floor where your child may stand during mealtimes. Make it large enough for them to be able to fidget, wiggle, bounce, and get their energy out — but small enough that they'll stay near the table and not bump into others.
- Once you've marked the space, introduce the idea to your child. Let them know they may sit if they wish, or if they feel the need to move around during mealtimes, they can move their chair away and use their marked spot instead.





DINNER GAMES

WAITER, WAITER!

- The Waiter, Waiter! game helps give short breaks from sitting at the table. You'll need a way to keep track of time and/or signal that it's time for the "waiter." Use an alarm on a phone, or keep a bell or buzzer on the table.
- At intervals throughout your meal, ring the bell to signal that it's time for your child to get ready to help.
- When the bell or alarm has sounded, cry "Waiter, Waiter!" Then follow it up with a request for help that allows the child to leave the table to complete a task.
For example:
 - "Waiter, waiter! Please bring more water to the table!"
 - "Waiter, waiter! We need more napkins, please!"
 - "Waiter, waiter! I spilled some sauce. Can you please bring a rag?"
 - "Waiter, waiter! Please bring us some ketchup!"
- Once your child has completed the task, make sure to say a big thank you before they sit back down.





DINNER GAMES

FOOD COLLAGE

Research shows that when kids play with their food they may be more apt to eat it. Let your kids play with their food!

Take the elements of a salad such as sliced red pepper, cucumbers, avocado, carrot sticks, lettuce leaves, cherry tomatoes, bean sprouts, and nuts and have each person make a face, a car, a plane, houses, or animals, out of these elements on a plate.

The only rule is that whatever you pick, you need to eat or at least take a bite.

