



4-H School-Age Child Care
University of California Cooperative Extension

PARENTS STYLES

Tips for Busy Parents

BUSY FAMILIES AND MEALTIME

Author: Nancy Feldman, Area Home Economist, Tuolumne, Mariposa & Calaveras Counties

Late from work, mom rushes in the door with hot "carry-out" dinner in hand, and quickly pulls out some paper plates. "Dinner is on the table. Come and eat." "Aw mom," says 11 year old David. "I'm watching T.V. Can't I just eat in front of the T. V. And mom, you have to take me to soccer practice in 20 minutes!"

Why is it important to have family mealtimes?

☆ **School-aged children are still small and dependent enough to be worried if you don't look out for them.** They might not show it, but they worry if there are not hot meals or if meal times are erratic. They wonder if they are going to be fed!

☆ **Research shows us that children who eat meals do better nutritionally than children who merely snack.** They eat a wider variety of foods, learn how to be polite at the table, and learn how to eat properly.

☆ **Mealtimes give you a chance to talk with your child.** If you make time for your child at this age chances are your child will make time for you later on as a teenager. Mealtimes can enhance positive family relationships.

What can I do to improve family meal time?

☆ **Plan mealtime so that your child comes to the table hungry.** Food will taste better, and she will be more likely to eat.

☆ **Involve your child in the planning and preparation of food.** Children at this age are beginning to have their own ideas, and want their opinions about food to count. Make this work for you. Try the activity on the back of this page to involve your child in meal planning.

☆ **Let children know ahead of time about what you expect from them at mealtime.** Involve the children in the development of family mealtime rules. For example:

- We expect everyone to be reasonably pleasant at the table.
- We expect the meal to last about 20 minutes.
- We expect everyone to try a wide variety of food.
- The TV will be turned off.
- If we have dessert, we will serve it with the meal and it won't be used as a bribe or reward.

Resource: How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much. Eilyn Satter Footsteps. University of Maryland, Cooperative Extension, 1985.

Play The Menu Game

Make a game of meal planning. It's fun, makes grocery shopping easier, teaches kids good food habits, divides up the work, and SAVES TIME! Assign each child a day of the week to plan a meal. Fill in the blanks below.

OUR MENU FOR THE WEEK OF: _____

SUNDAY MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY

MEAT/ ALTERNATE							
BREAD/ CEREAL							
FRUIT/ VEGETABLE							
MILK							