

Table Talk

- Ask each person at the table to share something good that happened that day, no matter how big or small.
- Discuss the last person you talked to before coming home that day. How do you know them and what did you talk about?
- Share an old photo of a relative. Discuss who they were/are, how they're related, what you know/remember about them. Talk about what life was like when the photo was taken and how it compares to life today. (If the person is alive you could invite them to dinner some time!)
- On each child's birthday, recount the delivery or coming home story. Invite siblings to share their memories as well.
- Ask each family member, "How would you change the world if you could?"
- Plan a family vacation. Since parents usually get to call the shots, ask children what they'd like to do on the next family get away.
- Invite a "pretend" guest to dinner (could be a cartoon character, actor, teacher, clergy person, etc.) Each family member gets a turn to decide who the pretend guest might be and the rest of the family must guess the guest's identity by asking a series of questions.
- Play the "If you could change" game. The questions all have to start with "If you could change..." Rule: do not ask about changing a person (teacher, friend or parent.) Examples: "If you could change one thing about your school, what would it be? If you could change one thing about this world, what would it be?"
- Spend time teaching your children about your heritage. Tell them about your relatives and the dinnertime customs that they shared. (May require a bit of research).
- Go around the table and see how many current U.S. Cabinet members you can name.
- Ask each family member what he or she would do with a million dollar lottery win.
- Discuss current events. Simply for younger family members. It's never too early to spark children's civic-mindedness.
- Formulate a family safety plan. Discuss fire exits in your home. Decide on a special code word to use when someone other than mom or dad needs to pick up kids from school.
- Go around the table and see how many state capitols you can name.

Ways to make meals memorable

- To add some excitement to family meals, try eating in a different place – on a picnic blanket in the living room, in a homemade fort, in the backyard or at a favorite restaurant.
- Make a favorite family meal and swap with a family friend/neighbor for a way to eat something new but not have to learn a new recipe or buy unique food.
- Prepare an appetizer, an entree, two side dishes and a dessert and assign a number to each item. As a family, or person by person, draw a number and start with that item of food. You could end up eating dessert first, then a side dish, then entree, then appetizer. Mix it up!
- At the beginning of the week, choose a day for a special color meal—all food that color. Family members could also dress in that color.
- Point to somewhere on the globe or a map and have dinner from that region (take out food is ok!)
- Set the dinner table with a tablecloth and fine china – even if your just serving hot dogs and baked beans for dinner.
- Fondue is a great way to keep dinner going longer and is very participatory. Family members can select their favorite parts of the meal (cheese, meats or sauces) for dipping.
- Have a "kids night" once a week or month. The kids (depending on their age) are responsible for planning and cooking the meal. Parents should not put restrictions on what the food is other than perhaps requiring several food groups be represented.
- Play restaurant. Kids write out all the beverage options in the house, all the appetizer options (could be crackers and slices of cheese), and any entrée leftover, or food they can make (may be just hot dogs or macaroni and cheese to start.) Desserts are listed as well. Kids set the table, seat their parents, give the menus and take their orders.
- Put the names of 20 countries in a hat. Once a week, have a different family member pick a country and work as a team to prepare foods native to that land at next week's meal. Get the kids involved in the research, menu planning, food preparation and cooking.
- Create circular stations of food preparation where everyone in the family knows how to do each task. You can set a timer or have a CD playing. When the timer goes off or the song changes, everyone has to stop their task and move to the next station. Stations could be vegetable chopping, setting the table, pouring the beverages, etc.
- Use the evening family meal to celebrate EVERYTHING - a good report card, a beautiful weather day, good sportsmanship, a new job, and every holiday from Arbor Day to Ground Hog Day