

How are the Children?



Suburban Ramsey
Family Collaborative

A Kids Matter! Parent Message

The Power of Family Meals

"How was school today?"

"Who did you hang out with at recess?"

"Did you see that beautiful sunrise this morning?"

Eating together as a family while chatting with your kids about their day on a regular basis doesn't seem like a big deal, but it turns out it serves as an integral protective factor in the lives of our children and youth.

Family meals help kids feel connected, supported and valued by their parents and siblings, especially when the conversation at supper time is positive.

Research shows that children who share at least three meals a week with their families:

Are <i>less</i> likely to:	And <i>more</i> likely to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smoke;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do better in school;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use drugs or alcohol;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have better social skills;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage in sexual activity;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eat a balanced and healthy diet;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feel stressed; or	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eat more fruits, vegetables, and dairy; and
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be depressed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eat less snack foods

A recent phone survey of 2,008 Americans sponsored by Barilla found that adults who eat with their kids regularly with few distractions (no TV or phone) report higher overall life satisfaction. "Family meals pay off for both adults and children" says William J. Doherty, Ph.D., professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota, who helped Barilla analyze the survey results.

A student climate survey of 7,101 7th, 9th and 11th graders in Suburban Ramsey showed that 74% of 7th graders enjoy meals together with their families at least 3-4 times a week or more, while that figure drops to 65% for 9th/11th graders.

1 The meal can be breakfast, lunch, dinner or even a healthy snack, as long as all or most family members who live in your household sit down together.

2 2009-2010 Student Climate Survey with districts 621, 622, 623 and 624.





What Parents Can Do:

Make eating meals together a priority. Think over the past week. How many times did you sit down with your children to eat a meal together? Each week, look at your calendar and plan *at least three* meals that everyone can eat together. A meal together can be take-out pizza, a healthy snack, Sunday brunch, a restaurant meal, etc. It's not about the food—it's about the time you spend together, talking and connecting.

Keep it simple. Get everyone involved. Even small children can help set the table, turn off the TV, or rinse the carrots. Make planning easier by having "Taco Tuesdays" or "Pizza Fridays" or another routine *your* kids would enjoy.

Make it pleasant. Don't use meals to lecture or reprimand. Turn off the TV and let the answering machine take calls. Ask each family member about their day, including high points and low points. Really listen and enjoy each other.

Make it fun! Once in awhile, try making meals that capture your kid's imagination and up the fun factor! Mummy hotdogs for Halloween, a picnic meal on a blanket in the living room, or lighting a few candles to set the mood. Children and youth appreciate variety and intentionality.

Don't slack off as your kids get older. As kids get older and more independent, you can suddenly realize that you're eating meals together less often as everyone grabs something on their way to their next activity. Keep the routine consistent as much as you can.

Resources:

- Visit [our website](#) for more tips and ideas for building and maintaining strong families and healthy children, including even [more conversation starter ideas](#).
- For more detailed research on the importance of family meals, with a special emphasis on its role in preventing substance abuse in youth, visit [the Family Day website of the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse](#).

How are the Children?



Suburban Ramsey
Family Collaborative