

## SHARE FAMILY MEALS

### Frequently Asked Questions



#### Share the Aloha!

Think of family dinner as a time to nourish your family, prevent all kinds of problems, increase your children's cognitive abilities, and provide pleasure and fun that they can build on for the rest of their lives."

-Dr. Anne Fishel,  
The Family Dinner Project

*Keiki to Career is a  
community partnership  
to create brighter  
futures for our island's  
keiki.*

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**What are the benefits?** Studies have linked sharing family meals with better performance in school, less risky behaviors (i.e. smoking, drinking, drug use), less teen pregnancy, and handling stress better. Sharing meals also increases nutrition, and reduces the risk of eating disorders and obesity. Sharing meals strengthens the family unit, and provides that essential sense of safety and belonging.

**How often do we need to eat together to see the benefits?** Sharing family meals 5 times or more per week provides the most benefits. But your family will still see some benefits by sharing 3 meals per week. Some families start with one meal a week and work their way up!

**Is dinner the best meal to eat together?** Dinner is a special time to share the day's events. But breakfast also works, or lunch on the week-ends. The best choices are the times that are easiest for your family, so you can eat together as often as possible.

**Can we eat in front of the TV?** No. The importance of eating together is the conversation and sharing special time with family members. Of course, families are encouraged to enjoy movies or special programs once in a while. But on a day to day basis, the TV should be turned off. A soft music background is fine.

**What about cell phones and other electronic devices?** Make meals the time to pay full attention to your children, and for them to focus their attention on you. Cell phones are a large distraction for most people. They should be turned off and kept off the table. Some families keep a "gadget basket" near the table so everyone can deposit their cell phones, tablets, video game players and other electronic gadgets during the meal.

**What kind of meals should we eat?** With everyone's hectic schedules, we recommend simple meals that are very easy to make. Ideally, try to make your meals as nutritious as possible (don't forget the vegetables!). There are many free and easy recipes on the internet, including 15-minute meals. Invite your children to suggest meals that they like, too.

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**What do we talk about?** Ask your family about their day and show your support and encouragement. Consider asking some fun or meaningful questions at dinner and watch the conversation blossom. Some families keep questions in a jar on the table and pull one out at mealtimes. Encourage children to add their own questions, too. Find a list of questions to get your family started at:



[www.keikitocareer.org/sharefamilymeals](http://www.keikitocareer.org/sharefamilymeals)

**Should my children help with the meal?** Absolutely! Ask your school-aged children to help set and clear the table. If they are old enough, have them help you in the kitchen, too. Preparing food together is a great way to bond with your children. Every family member should contribute something. Some families create a schedule so everyone knows what is expected of them.

**My family sometimes argues or creates tension at mealtime. What can I do?** It may take some time to get into a new routine at mealtime, and it is up to the adults to set the new tone at the table. Meal times should be the time for love and support. It should not be the time to criticize or discipline your children. For example, encourage your children to try new foods, but don't make the meal a fight over finishing every bite. To improve your family's mealtime experience, try using fun "conversation starter" questions or playing word games at the table. Some families use a "talking stick", and only the person holding the stick can talk, but be sure everyone gets an equal time to hold it. There are some great tips on how to "tame the tension" at [www.thefamilydinnerproject.org](http://www.thefamilydinnerproject.org).

**For more resources on eating meals together, please visit:**

<http://keikitocareer.org/call-to-action/family-meals-together/>

