Gathering at the Table: Family Dinner . . . The Best Prevention---references and quotes:
(Barbra Spuhler, BYU Women’s Conference, Friday May 3, 11:00, CONF 2258-2260


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“If parents have heard anything in the last few years, it’s that family dinner is great for kids...Yet here’s the bad news: Fewer and fewer of us can make this happen with our schedules. A UNICEF study found that the United States ranked 23rd out of 25 countries in the percentage of children who eat the main meal of the day with their parents several times a week.” --Bruce Feiler, CNN and New York Times contributor and author of The Secrets of Happy Families

Less than 40% of American families sit down to a meal together on a regular basis. The Hour That Matters Most, p. 33.

“In 1970, Americans spent about $6 billion on fast food; today we spend more than $110 billion. Americans now spend more on fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music---combined.” The Hour That Matters Most, p. xiii

“Living in the car is no longer a reality only for people without homes. It’s also a way of life for literally millions of families who’ve allowed their schedules to become so overburdened that they can hardly find time for regular family meals…” The Time-Starved Family, p. viii

According to the famous study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, the more often families eat together, the more likely teens are to say they can communicate easily with their parents and feel that they have an excellent relationship with their parents and that their parents love them. Nearly 75% of teens think that eating dinner with their parents is important and say that spending time with their family is what makes them happy. The Hour That Matters Most, p. 19, 22.

“It is impossible to overestimate the influence of parents who understand the hearts of their children. Research shows that during the most important transitions of life---including those periods when youth are most likely to drift away from the Church---the greatest influence does not come from an interview with the bishop or some other leader but from the regular, warm, friendly, caring interaction with parents. With that in mind, when we sit down at the dinner table, is our whole family there?” --Elder Robert D. Hales, Ensign, May 2010

“As my wife and I have made our children’s activities outside the home a matter of pondering and prayer, some of the things we had thought to be important turned out to be unnecessary.” --Darrin E. Schmidt, “Meaningful Teaching at Home”, Ensign, Jan. 2013, p. 10
“...eat together as often as possible, making dinner a time of communication and the teaching of values.” He promised us that our strengthened family cultures “will be a protection for our children from the fiery darts of the adversary” and the worldly “cultures to which they are constantly exposed”.  --Elder L. Tom Perry, Ensign, Nov. 2012

“Precious moments of opportunity to interact with our children dissolve when we are occupied with distractions.”

  --Sister Rosemary Wixom, Ensign, May 2013

“Mothers who know do less. They permit less of what will not bear good fruit eternally. They allow less media in their homes, less distraction, less activity that draws their children away from their home. Mothers who know are willing to live on less and consume less of the world’s goods in order to spend more time with their children—more time eating together, more time working together, more time reading together, more time talking, laughing, singing, and exemplifying. These mothers choose carefully and do not try to choose it all.”  --Julie B. Beck, Ensign, Nov. 2007

“I like the smell of dinner in the oven. Maybe it’s the closest I will ever come to experiencing the fulfillment of the scripture: “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear.”” (D&C 38:30) --Marjorie Pay Hinckley

“Think of mealtime as a celebration. After our whole family has survived another day, with all of its ups and downs, we come together in the evening and celebrate.”  --Janene Woolsey Baadsgaard, Ensign, Sept. 1998

“I think that you learn so much at the table when you’re young. You learn how to sit...You learn how to take turns talking and listening. You learn how to tell a story... You learn manners. There’s a lot more happening than just the eating.”  ---MariaLisa Calta, Barbarians at the Plate: Taming & Feeding the Modern American Family

“Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others. If you have that awareness, you have good manners, no matter which fork you use.”  ---Emily Post

“...by small and simple things are great things brought to pass...” -- Alma 37:6

“...simple, consistent good habits lead to a life full of bountiful blessings.” --Elder Richard G. Scott, Ensign, May 2013

“Ordinary people who faithfully, diligently, and consistently do simple things that are right before God will bring forth extraordinary results.”  --Elder David A. Bednar, BYU Women’s Conference, April 29, 2011

Websites recommended:

http://www.thefamilydinnerproject.org (blogs, recipes, games, great resource!)
http://www.eatdinner.org  (great resource; link to B4FD; tips on involving teens in meal prep, etc.)
http://www.thekidscookmonday.org (includes recipes divided into ages 4-7, 8-11, 12-15; links to 4 wonderful blogs
http://dinnertogther.com  (great mission statement)
http://www.foodnanny.org (tips for reclaiming family dinner; simple, nutritious meals; two-week menu plans; involving kids in prep; link to her blog; can watch her show on BYU TV or online)

www.byutv.org/foodnanny/
http://www.thenaptimechef.com/ (fitting great food into family life)
http://simplescratchcooking.wordpress.com/
http://www.SixSistersStuff.com
http://www.ourbestbites.com/
http://www.abountifulkitchen.com  (a beautiful, rather gourmet site which belongs to a good friend of mine)
**Discussion-starters:** (Google “discussion starters” for hundreds of suggestions on family-friendly websites)

Highlight and lowlight of the day for each family member (or call it Mad, Sad, Glad for young children)

What is one interesting thing you learned today?
If you could have any super power, what would it be and why?
Who is or was your favorite teacher? Why?
What’s your favorite movie? Why? What do you think the “take-away” message of this movie is?
If the house is on fire and you can only take two things, what would they be?
What is your idea of an ideal day?
If you were invisible where would you go and what would you do?
What do you worry about the most?
Name an ancestor and tell what you know about them.
What is your favorite family tradition?
What three words do you think best describe our family?
Name all of the pets you’ve had.
Name a place that you don’t ever want to go.
Name 2 of your closest friends and what you like about each one.
Name three things you would want to have on a deserted island.
When are you most likely to lose your temper and why?
Name something you take for granted. (Can go around the table until no one can think of anything else; results in feelings of gratitude)

How many times do you think you said thank-you to someone today?
Name something you are afraid of or something that makes you nervous.
Describe your dream vacation.
Name something you do that helps you relax when you’re tense. (Siblings share coping skills they’ve learned)

**Family Dinner Games  …Hunger Games** (Google “family dinner games” for dozens of ideas on fun family websites)

**My Special Talent Is:** Have everyone reveal something they’re good at that no one else knows about.

**What I Like About You:** Pick one person at the table, and have everyone tell something they like about the person. You can use a spoon or the salt shaker or any fun item to pass around to the next speaker so little ones can keep track of whose turn it is and build excitement.

**I Remember When:** Everyone completes the sentence. Decide whether the sentence will be about yourself or someone else at the table.

**I Never:** Each person at the table says something they have never done. If anyone else at the table has done it, they raise one finger. When all five fingers are raised you are out. The object is to come up with enough common things that you’ve never done but others surely have. (a nightmare, a cavity, mosquito bite, etc.) The person with the fewest fingers raised wins. Let the stories and explanations roll!

**You Don’t Say:** Think of a famous person, then give clues without using any proper names, rhymes, or direct hints.

**Who Are You?** Describe yourself in three adjectives, like “juicy”, “crunchy” or “luscious”. Challenge older kids to use words a little more descriptive than “smart”, “pretty” and “athletic”.

**Fortunately/Unfortunately:** Each person begins a sentence by alternating between “fortunately” and “unfortunately”. Fortunately, you can be really silly and creative with this game. Unfortunately, the kids will be so excited to talk, they might talk with their mouths full. Fortunately, the dinner table is also a fabulous place to teach manners.

**Name Change:** Taking turns around the table, everyone says what they would call themselves if they could change their names today. Bonus round: Let each person rename the person sitting next to them.

**When I Grow Up:** Go around the table and have each person say what they want to be when they grow up and why. Play this one often because the answers change regularly and are likely to surprise you!

**Joke It Up:** Each person brings a joke to the table to share (What has more lives than a cat? A frog---it croaks every night! What did one eye say to the other? There is something between us that smells!)

**What Would You Do?** If you were faced with a choice between ______________ or ______________, what would you choose to do? Why? (Develops problem-solving thinking skills)

**Language Builders:** Ask questions such as “What types of things mosey?” (old people, shoppers, cows grazing, turtles) “What types of things speed?” (trains, racecars, jets, cheetahs, Superman, etc.) Each person gives only one answer until no one can think of any more.

**Learning Center:** You might want to make your table a learning center by putting interesting maps, kids’ drawings, pictures, quotes or scriptures under a clear plastic tablecloth for dinner discussion and change them often to keep kids’ interest up. You could even do a diagram of how to set the table so kids can know where to put utensils and cups and napkins.

**Pop Culture:** Families of older children can discuss and evaluate popular movies, books, world news events.