

Lesson Plans for Family Meals / Comidas en Familia

Hop-A-Lot's First Steps to Fitness

Dianne Warren / Oasis Publications

Goal: To apply the understanding of why sharing meals (past infancy) is important to the physical, mental, emotional and social development of children.

Objectives for Parent:

1. To build the emotional health of my child during shared meals.
2. To develop social skills through family meals.
3. To understand & apply parents' feeding & children's eating responsibilities.
4. To enjoy eating in a restaurant with my child.
5. To develop my child's school readiness skills while sharing meals.
6. To use family meals to build life-long healthy practices.

Objectives for Child:

7. To join in family meals.
8. To increase understanding of words and reading skills at family meals.

Lesson Plan Set-up:

There are many ways to use **Family Meals / Comidas en Familia**. It is a teaching tool for both the mother and the child, so depending upon the situation it will be used differently.

- Small groups of mothers can be directed through the book by a staff member following the lesson plan.
- Use one objective each time the group gathers. There is a lot of background information tied to each book page and many related activities. You will find some points repeated.
- Use what works. Mothers need to see how easy and "do-able" this is.

- You may begin by allowing each mother to choose one entry in the **Parents' Corner** and share what it means to her. It is very interesting to see how this varies within groups and what the mothers can learn from one another.
- Each numbered objective in the lesson plan will be followed by the related page numbers (in parenthesis) from the book. Make sure everyone is on the same page. All illustrations and information are the same for both English & Spanish sides.
- Mothers will read the book to their children and talk to them about the topic being covered. Have mothers share their children's responses with the group.

Activities to Accomplish Objectives:

1. (Page 1) To build the emotional health of my child during family meals.

1. A. "A place at the table" has emotional importance to all family members sharing meals.

- Safe seating arrangements for your child make him feel safe and comfortable at the table.
- Use child sized utensils, plates and cups.
- Meals should be shared by all those who make up your family. Everyone present should join in.

1. B. Children need repetition and limitations to feel safe and secure.

- Have meals around the same time each day. A child must trust that you will feed him regular, scheduled meals. This gives the child a feeling of security about his food.
- Every meal does not need to be shared by all family members, but your child should never eat alone. Not only is it unsafe, but important time together is missed.
- When you eat with your child, it gives him the support to try new foods and develop new skills.
- Have a reasonable outlook about mealtime behavior. Set rules, but expect spills and playing with food.

- Excuse your child when he is full or no longer interested in food.

1. C. Treat your child as a member of the family, not the center of attention.

- Let your child have a turn to talk, but he must also learn to listen. This builds a sense of sharing and caring about others.
- Tell family stories and histories. This creates a sense of belonging.
- Family values and expectations are learned around the family table.
- Fewer risky social behaviors, such as early drinking, drug use, smoking and underage sex are linked to children who regularly share family meals.

1. D. Parents must model the behaviors they want their children to learn.

- Your manners, conversations, values and food choices will be copied by your children.
- Save unpleasant or “hot button” topics for other times. Make mealtimes enjoyable.
- Regularly shared mealtimes show your family that they come first. This builds their emotional well-being and a sense of belonging.

1. E. Create a special setting to mark your child’s **place at the table.**

- Let your child choose colorful wrapping paper, Sunday comics, old calendars or a special picture to create his own placemat.
- If child is old enough, let him draw his own placemat on legal size paper. You can laminate it for longer life.



2. (Page 2) To develop social skills through family meals.

2. A. Social skills help us get along with others.

- Table manners, talking skills, patience and acceptance are learned around the dining table as your child copies how you act with others.
- Parents must model behaviors they want their children to learn.

2. B. Thank your child for pleasant mealtime behavior.

2. C. Make a **Please, Thank You** and **Excuse Me** chart for the refrigerator. Let your child mark the right column each time he uses his manners.

2. D. Read and discuss the children's book ***The Berenstain Bears Forget Their Manners.***

3. (Pages 3, 4, 5) **I will understand and apply Ellyn Satter's eating and feeding responsibilities.**

This understanding is at the heart of enjoyable family meals. Children and parents have different mealtime responsibilities.

3. A. Parents decide **when** meals will be served.

- Parents' responsibility is to serve 3 meals and 2 snacks at regular times everyday.
- Mealtimes that your child can depend upon allow him to feel secure that he will eat regularly. A child knows he does not have to overeat or hide food. This is food security.
- He also knows that if he is not hungry he doesn't have to eat anyway, because another meal or snack is coming soon.
- When a child is uncertain about when he will get food, it upsets his ability to self-regulate his food intake. He learns to ignore his natural full and hungry signals. This can lead to weight problems in the future.
- Grazing, or constantly eating small meals, can spoil a child's appetite and interfere with meals and the skills learned during shared mealtimes.

3. B. Parents decide **where** meals will be served.

- The table, bar/counter, picnic table/blanket or restaurant, where ever family members gather, is considered the family table.
- Child-sized eating utensils, cups and plates are best to use.
- Highchairs, booster seats or other seating is provided to make sure the child is safe and comfortable at the table.

- TV's and cell phones should be turned off. Families should pay attention to the food and to each other.
- It is best not to let children wander around the house eating food. Not only is this unsanitary and unsafe, it upsets mealtimes.
- Children want to join in family meals, so make them enjoyable. Expect spills, don't over-react to playing with food and excuse children from the table when they are full and have lost interest in eating.

3. C. Parents decide what is served at each meal.

- Serve a wide variety of tasty, healthy foods that are bite-sized, moist and in child sized portions.
- Discuss the health benefits of the new **WIC food package**.
- New foods are unsettling to many children. Present them in small servings with foods they know and eat, such as bread, tortillas and rice. You may have to do this up to 20 times before they accept new foods.
- The more variety of foods served, the healthier the meals will be. In a week's time, children will eat a balanced diet if provided a variety of healthy foods. Don't worry.
- Prepare the family's meal first and adapt it to the needs of your child. The child will see that everyone is eating the same food and feel comforted. This decreases catering to the food preferences of the child.
- Snacks and beverages need to be healthy. Sweetened juices and sodas are full of empty calories and can cause weight gain among children. They also contribute to dental cavities. Serve low fat milk or low fat, fortified soy or rice milk with meals. Offer water between meals. Limit soda consumption to special occasions.
- Drinks before meals decrease your child's appetite and he may eat less at mealtimes.
- Your child's favorite foods today may not be the same tomorrow. Be prepared for food preferences to change. Go with the flow.....

3. D. Children decide how much to eat.

- Each child knows how much food he needs and will naturally eat the right amount for his growth and activity levels. This is very difficult for many parents to accept.

- Your child's appetite will vary from day to day depending on activity levels, distractions, growth cycles, moods, food served, etc. Be prepared for changes.
- Having foods limited or taken away, as well as food being forced upon a child will interfere with his signals for hunger and fullness.
- Controlling your child's food intake can lead to future problems with over and under-eating and impairs his ability to maintain a healthy weight.

3. E. Children decide whether to eat.

- Changes in activity and growth levels, moods, distractions and foods served determine not only how much, but whether a child eats. This is another challenge for parents.
- Do not overreact to a missed meal. A child will sense your concern and use it to his advantage.
- Maintain your feeding schedule. Do not make special arrangements if your child misses a meal. Be consistent.
- Even though your child is not hungry at a scheduled meal or snack time, still have him join you at the table. This reinforces the consistency of meal and snack times. He does not have to stay long, but needs to see that meals are served whether or not he chooses to eat.

4. (Page 6) To enjoy eating in a restaurant with my child.

4. A. Eating in a restaurant with young children is a real challenge.

- Talk to your child about the new eating place before you go out.
- Make sure child is well rested and not past his meal time.
- Take small games, books or crayons to occupy your child while you wait for the food. Ask your server if they have any kid-friendly activities.
- Take crackers or cut up fruit in case food is delayed. You can also ask for bread or crackers.
- If your child is being disruptive, leave or have an adult remove the child from the restaurant.
- Child friendly restaurants are a good place to start, but you have to be

careful about food selections. Kids' menus are usually very unhealthy, loaded with salt, sugar and fats.

4. B. Some restaurant food is getting healthier.

- Order the fruit and salad selections, grilled chicken, low fat milk, yogurt, "apple fries" and smoothies.
- Let your child select from the healthy food choices.

4. C. Fast food has two meanings: prepared **fast**, eaten **fast**.

- When visiting a fast food restaurant, limit eating in the car.
- Take food to the park, beach, backyard or playground where the meal can be shared face to face, while talking and eating more slowly.
- You can get it fast, but you don't have to eat it fast.

5. (Page 7) To develop school readiness during family meals.

5. A. School preparation begins around the family table.

- The "teaching" that goes on around a family table is your child's first classroom.
- You, the parent, are your child's first and most important teacher.

5. B. Dinner table conversation builds your child's vocabulary.

- Involve your child in talking around the dining table. Don't let him dominate. A child learns to talk by listening to you talk.
- Ask about your child's day in a way that can not be answered in one word. Ask him "What was the best, or worst, thing that happened to you today?" or "Give me 3 words that describe your potatoes."
- Reading and writing are learned more quickly by children who have lots of experience talking and listening.
- Children who regularly share family meals appear to get better grades in school.

5. C. Ask the mothers to share what questions worked best with their children. What other ways did they use to involve their children in table-time conversations?
5. D. Reading to your child after a meal not only helps his food digest. Reading to your child is important because:
- Your child builds vocabulary.
 - Your child is exposed to new ideas.
 - You and your child share an enjoyable and educational time.
5. E. Read about topics you want your child to value and learn about.
- ***Vegetable Soup / The Fruit Bowl***, a 2-sided book that talks about the importance of eating fruits and vegetables. www.fitness4kidz.com
 - ***Eating the Alphabet***, by Lois Ehlert
 - ***I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato***, by Lauren Child
 - ***The Very Hungry Caterpillar***, by Eric Carle
 - ***Carlos and Clarice Mooove to Lowfat Milk!***
www.doh.state.fl.us/family/wic/index.html
5. F. Compliment your child for using good manners and contributing to a pleasant mealtime experience.
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6. (Page 8) **Use family meals to build life-long healthy practices.**

6. A. Healthy eating habits started early in childhood follow the child through life.

- Children who share family meals eat fewer fried foods and drink fewer sodas.
- Children who share family meals eat more fruits and vegetables and a wider variety of all other foods, making meals healthier.
- Children who share family meals eat slower and eat less. It takes 20 minutes for your stomach to realize it is full.

6. B. Read *Berenstain Bears and Too Much Junk Food*.

6. C. The social skills learned around the family table will improve your child's life by:

- creating healthy relationships,
- building self-confidence,
- increasing the child's ability to express himself,
- teaching the value of being a good listener.

6. D. A child who regularly shares family meals may do better in school.

- A large vocabulary is the basis for reading success.
- The best ways to build vocabulary are talking, listening and reading.
- Talking around the family table exposes children to a wide variety of ideas, ways to express and new words.
- Early school success is based upon a child's ability to read.
- Mastery of all other school subjects is based on the ability to read.
- Reading success encourages your child to read for fun.

6. E. Children who share family meals enjoy a healthy emotional life. They:

- feel better about themselves and have higher self-esteem
- treat others better and have healthier relationships
- count on parents being involved in their lives and make better decisions
- are less involved in risky behaviors (tobacco, drugs, alcohol, sex)
- are confident and have a positive approach to life.

7. Child enjoys shared mealtimes.

7. A. When your child joins the family table, it must be pleasant for all.

- Make sure your child is hungry, not starving, tired or cranky, and ready to enjoy a family meal.
- A child must do his part to make mealtimes enjoyable. Parents must set limits to prevent him from complaining and whining about food choices, disturbing others or acting out. Good manners allow everyone to enjoy the meal.
- Parents must have realistic goals for age-appropriate mealtime behavior. Be consistent.
- Disturbing behaviors that make mealtimes unpleasant should not be tolerated. If continued after a verbal warning, excuse the child from the table and do not let him return until the next meal.
- Recognize behavior stemming from boredom or because the child is full. Excuse him from the table.
- Don't offer food to children that misbehaved because they are still hungry. They should wait for the next scheduled meal. Again, being consistent is the best teacher.

8. Child joins in mealtime conversations.

8. A. It is important that non-English speaking parents use their native language when speaking to their children because:

- The language experience will be richer and communication more complete.
- After the child has mastered English, he will still be able to talk with his parents.
- When this child enters school, learning English will be faster and easier because he understands his first language.
- This also ensures a strong link to the child's cultural background and a stronger child to parent relationship because the parent has been

supportive and encouraging during the early child-rearing years.

8. B. Refer to 5.B.

8. C. Refer to 5.C.

Summary

The benefits of shared meals affect every part of children's lives;

- Their physical, emotional, social and mental lives are all improved.
- Healthy meals shared by family members improve physical health and build healthy habits that follow a child through life.
- Regular, shared meals show that we care for each other and that we value our time together as a family.
- Family values and expectations expressed around the dining table serve as important guidelines to healthy behaviors.
- Social skills developed around the family table provide the basis for children's present and future relationships.
- Table-time conversations develop talking and listening skills.
- Mealtime conversations widen children's vocabularies.
- Talking and listening lead to reading success.
- Reading success, leads to school success, which leads to future successes.
- Family meals are available to all of us. We don't need special training or large bank accounts to join in. All we need is each other and a desire to be together.

Oasis Publications

2344 Cambridge Drive * Sarasota, FL 34232

941-371-2223 / Phone * 941-371-4309 / Fax

oasis.dianne@verizon.net * www.fitness4kidz.com

