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NF01-489 Creating a Strong Family: The Family That Eats Happily Together Stays Together

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Creating a Strong Family The Family That Eats Happily Together Stays Together

By John DeFrain, Extension Specialist, Family and Community Development

When people in strong families talk about what makes them strong, doing enjoyable things together is mentioned time and time again. The list of enjoyable activities is a lengthy one, of course, and each family is unique in this regard.

Common elements on the list include:

- eating meals together
- working together on house and yard chores
- outdoor activities such as camping, canoeing, hiking, picnicking, stargazing, sporting events, bicycling, walking, swimming
- visiting museums and art galleries
- vacations and traveling together
- involvement in the children's activities
- reading together
- artwork together
- going to the movies
- involvement in religious activities and community service projects.

And so forth. Each family's list is different, but the common denominator is that the activity is an opportunity for the family members to be together, enjoying each other's company and communicating about what's happening to each of them in life.

Mealtimes together can be especially good, and families that eat together a lot have countless opportunities to develop positive emotional bonds with each other. What good things happen when we break bread together? Let's listen to what family members themselves have to say:

"We eat the evening meal together. In extreme cases, one of us may not be there, but everyone knows

that being absent from dinner is not taken lightly. We use that time to share triumphs and tribulations. In a hectic world, we need some common ground where we can meet."

* * * * *

"We always eat dinner together and try to be together for breakfast as well. And we have a rule of no television during meals."

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"It's a time when we can slow down, relax and learn about all the ups and downs in each other's lives. Most of the time, the discussions are pretty relaxed. We make a big effort to be pleasant and build a positive atmosphere. Who wants indigestion? But, sometimes the discussions can focus on pretty serious issues, and after the food's all eaten, we'll still be sitting there trying to figure out how to meet one of life's challenges together."

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"When you've got little kids, mealtime can get pretty scary sometimes. We had one kid who would fall asleep in her spaghetti, nose down. We had another who liked to toss her food across the room. And sometimes the three of them would get in a raucous competition to see who could get the most attention from Mom and Dad. But most of the time it was a golden opportunity for us to hear good stories and witness the wonder of the children's lives unfolding as they grew in the world. It was a sacred time."

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"We often begin our meals with a prayer of thanks. It kind of sets the tone for the meal, helping us all get calmed down a bit and acknowledging that this, indeed, is an important time for us, just being together. We know traditional prayers for mealtime, and we know more contemporary words. One I like a lot is to simply go around the table and ask each family member to talk about what they are thankful for in life. 'I'm thankful for my family and that we are together today.' 'I'm thankful that I kicked the soccer ball good today.' 'I'm thankful for my kitty.' It helps us all look for the good in life."

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