



Personal Safety Nets® e-Newsletter



The Truth About Family Meals

April 2013, Issue 59

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Wisdom Series Continues



Our series of retreat workshops entitled "Giving and Receiving Wise Help and Support" is designed to guide and empower women to take charge of creating and maintaining circles of support. We will continue with:

#3 in the series: "Building On and Celebrating Your Inner & Outer Resources" on Saturday, June 29th from 10 am to 4 pm.

#4 in the series, "Extending Your Inner & Outer Resources to Build Community" will be Saturday, September 14th from 10 am to 4 pm.



The retreats, for women of all ages, will be conducted by Judy Pigott, founder of Personal

The Truth About Family Meals

It's Springtime. Seeds are in the ground, or soon to be planted, and within weeks the wonderful abundance that grows all around us will be on our dining room tables. But who will be at the table when we share this bounty? How we share this goodness, with whom, and how often, bring us more than just nutritional benefits! This is especially true in families with children.



American's dining room practices have changed over time (see our story *Have Families Always Eaten Did American Families Always Eat Together?*)



But **never have there been more distractions and more alternatives to dissuade us from eating at home as a family.** Ten years ago the **Gallup Poll** told us kids were taking part in more after-school activities than ever, with parents going straight from work to soccer practice, piano lessons, or car pools. Gallup researchers concluded there simply wasn't much time available for cooking, and therefore eating was more often done on the run. They looked at numbers, as researchers do.

Today 43% of American households cook dinner at home six or seven nights per week, with 31% cooking at home every night. 77% of children and youth eat meals with their families four or more times per week and 39% do so all seven nights. While this sounds great, **CBS News' *How And Where America Eats*** reports, "**fewer Americans with children dine together every night now than did so 15 years ago.**" [Read more on their report here.](#)



What's the big deal? Surely we can survive as a nation without families eating most of their meals together. But can we? Is there a difference in behavior, success in school, or health that is tied to this? Are there more than just social or nutritional benefits when we share the bounty of food as a family? **It turns out that the more family meals eaten together (especially at home and without television or devices),**



Safety Nets® and Trudy James, founder of HeartWork .



They will be held at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in West Seattle.

Cost for the full day, including a delicious, organic homemade lunch, is \$70.00 per person.



Simply click the date to register: **June 29th, September 14th** or call 206-659-0665.

Two earlier retreat workshops were entitled: "Listening for Inner & Outer Resources" and "Finding and Using Your Inner & Outer Resources." Attendees need not have gone to an earlier workshop to attend Parts 3 or 4.

Did American Families Always Eat Together?

Throughout most of the 1700's, American agrarian families interacted with one another throughout the day. John Gillis' *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* tells us they ate their meals together but only the men were seated. Women and children ate standing, hastily so they could resume their tasks at hand.

the better these outcomes.

Larry Fortun of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, at the University of Florida, in his ***Family Nutrition: The Truth about Family Meals***, reviews findings that tell us **regular family meals are related to: better adjustment in children and youth; earning better grades, more motivation and getting along better with others** at school.



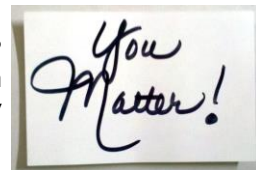
On the other hand, those who do not eat regular family meals together are more likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, or use other drugs. Children and youth who do not eat family meals together are also more likely to report feeling depressed or having trouble at school. He also reports the negative impact watching television or using technology (cell phones) has on the positive family dining experience.

Nancy Gibbs, in *Time Magazine's The Magic of the Family Meal*, and Jeanie Lerche Davis of **WebMD**, summarize the recent findings concerning the benefits of family dinners:

- Everyone eats healthier meals.
- Kids are less likely to become overweight or obese.
- Kids more likely to stay away from cigarettes.
- They're less likely to drink alcohol.
- They won't likely try marijuana.
- They're less likely to use illicit drugs.
- Friends won't likely abuse prescription drugs.
- School grades will be better.
- You and your kids will talk more.
- You'll be more likely to hear about a serious problem.
- Kids will feel like you're proud of them.
- There will be less stress and tension at home.



Not bad, eh? From a Personal Safety Nets



perspective, it's easy to understand. **We all share a human set of three needs: TO BE SEEN FOR WHO WE ARE, TO HAVE**

WHAT WE'RE SAYING REALLY HEARD, AND TO MATTER TO SOMEONE ELSE. Where better to learn that than at the family table (with all due acknowledgement that each family is unique, and not all table experiences promote meeting these important connections).

There's much more to read on family dining and the overwhelming positive effects and benefits of sharing a meal as a family - work conducted by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia





A century later industrialization changed the scheme of working at home. Better paying production jobs kept men at work and away from the family home. Women took on more responsibilities for, and remained connected to, the home. According to *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* it was **exactly here** that the "traditional family meal" was created. **Family meals became special occasions that occurred every day, reconnecting family members and providing the opportunity to mold and teach the children order, good manners, responsibility, and self-discipline.**



As immigration flourished throughout the latter half of the 19th century and more families rushed to the cities, eating patterns, diets, and meal schedules reflected the more urban lifestyle. Women more commonly left the home for work, and **parents found it easier to follow family traditions and customs on weekends and holidays when they had more time.**



Family mealtimes saw a change during World War I and

University **(CASA)**, the **FamilyResiliencyCenter**, and **TheFamilyDinnerProject.org**.

Steps 1 & 2: Getting Kids to the Table And De-Stressing You & Them

Larry Forthun of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences tries to give us some help by answers the question: *How Do I Get the Whole Family to the Dinner Table?*



dinner is served and when they must be home.

* **Make shared family meals a priority.** Emphasize the importance of being together, not creating an elaborate meal that everyone will enjoy. Set regular meal times by writing them on the calendar. Let everyone know when

* **If the family is not used to eating together regularly, start small.** At first, get used to eating together by scheduling family meals two or three days per week. Then, as the weeks progress, begin to have more and more regular meals. Research finds that families who eat dinner together five nights a week reap great benefits, but there is no absolute magic number. Remember, dinner time isn't the only time you can have a family meal - if breakfast or lunch is easier - start there.



* **Make family meals fun** (but remember: not every meal can be together or wonderful.). Include everyone in the preparation of the meal and in the decision about what foods will be offered during the meal. Of course, parents have final say about what foods are prepared, but allow all who want to participate to help create the fun environment. (Even homework, done at the counter, can be participation.)



* **Keep a sense of humor while at the table.**

* **Eliminate distractions, like TV, telephone, and cell phones.**



* **Try to limit the conversations to positive or neutral topics.** Do not let the conversation get out of hand and don't allow family members to criticize one another. Keep it light and fun. Create an environment that leads to healthy communication. Don't use family mealtime to discuss the "honey-do" list, your medical problems, or why you hate your boss or your mother.

changed even more drastically during World War II. **American men went off to war in large numbers and more and more women entered the work force.** Once reserved for men, women now took up jobs in industry and business and found long-lasting careers and great success. **But working full time jobs made it hard to maintain their home life traditions.**



While two-parent nuclear families were the statistical norm in 1950's middle-class America, family dinners at home were a ritual reflected not in real life but on TV shows such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*. Americans, when they had time to eat together, often took to eating meals on trays in front of televisions. **Discussions and traditions were often replaced by convenience, speed and necessity.**



As the 20th century proceeded through its last twenty five years, more family meals reflected the growing pace of American life - more hurried and disjointed with fewer and fewer families sitting down at the table to dine together.

* **Turn down the volume.** Nothing brings down the stress level like turning down the volume of your environment. Plus, a toned-down environment helps you focus more on what you are eating, portion size, and feelings of fullness. Let each family member contribute suggestions about what to play, or letting a different person pick the music for each meal.



* **See if you can get some things done ahead of time.** See if you can cook a big batch of soup, stew or chili, or a double batch of a casserole over the weekend, and then freeze some to make weekday dinners easier. Look for things to make your life easier - like pre-cut veggies, or pre-made pizza dough.



Look for new recipes that take less than 15 minutes.

* **Take a breather before you hit the kitchen.** Take a few moments of personal time to try to switch gears.

* **It's never too early to be a good role model.** Show children good etiquette and table manners.



* **Eat slowly.** Remember, this is an opportunity for the family to spend time together. Do not make it about the food; make it about the family.

Letters,

We Get Letters . . .

"After a recent talk with you, I did some research on men and eating disorders. I thought it was largely a woman's issue! But what I found really surprised me! The major statistic that caught my attention ... it is estimated that there are 7 million women and 1 million men who suffer from eating disorders. I had no idea!



Thanks for enlightening me. I look forward to learning more about this and other issues in your monthly newsletter."

- Gary H.

Editor's Note: Gary, thanks for your note, and as you found out, a million men experiencing this debilitating set of issues is significant!

Creating, building, and paying attention to the support network around us - that we can access - is key to having a resourceful and resilient life and may be very important to dealing with this problem.

What has been proven is that having positive peer support helps when we are trying to deal with issues within the realm of our Personal Safety Nets - and "health and wellness" is one important realm. **We increase our level of accountability when we commit to behavior change with another non-**





While research shows that family meals facilitate children's social, cognitive, emotional, and nutritional development, **more of us continue to be eating food at or from fast-food restaurants, often in front of the TV, or some other kind of distraction.**

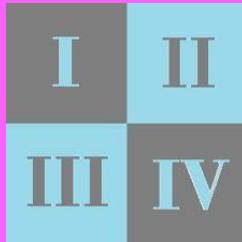
Many would argue that we've gone too far down the road of individual needs and wants (within the family) to be able to put the family back at the dining room table together.



**What are your thoughts on family dining?
We'd love to hear from you.
Send comments to us at
info@personalsafetynet.com.**

family member. Whether it's exercise or healthy diet habits, we increase the likelihood of successful behavior with a connection to another who has a similar interest. (We don't know exactly why non-family member contracts are more effective than with family members - but they are.

For men, as well as women, **it's not physical closeness to the support person or group that's important - it's the agreement to make the change and the working together** - even through regularly checking in - that seems make the change work. Think broadly, email works too.



But as we've said before, a PSN is more than this. **Having a particular part of your life (realm) well supported includes: 1) checking for "inner resources" - maybe determination or intelligence, then 2) looking for "outer resources" -maybe a counselor or support group, 3) thinking of people who are or could be involved - who they are and what they might truly bring to the table, and then, 4)) having thought through these, it's time to weave a plan for connecting the dots where they exist and filling holes where they're found.**

So, to all 8 million with eating disorders, we send a message of hope. You matter to the world, and your health heals us all.

* * * * *

Editor's Note: A big shout-out to **Stephanie Coontz** and her book, *The Way We Never Were*, for providing inspiration for this month's topic, "The Truth About Family Meals."