

FAMILY HISTORY AT FAMILY DINNER



Food

Make a beautiful brunch -- or brunchy dinner -- with these easy recipes!



Fun

Get to know your family history with a round of "Which One?"



Conversation

Set the table with these Interview placemats to help everyone discover more family stories!

Interview

- ? Talk about a time you tried something new. What was it? What happened?
- ? What was your favorite tradition when you were a child? Have you passed that down to future generations? Will you?
- ? Tell me your favorite story about our family. Why do you like this story in particular?
- ? Do you know any stories about your grandparents when they were kids?
- ? Tell me something about yourself that you think I might not know.

Resilience is a hot topic these days -- everyone wants to know how to become more resilient, how to raise resilient kids and what it all means in the long term for our success and happiness. The ability to bounce back from hard times and keep a positive attitude can certainly be a help in life, but exactly how do people develop resilience? Is it just a matter of taking some hard knocks and learning to get back up to try again?

Learning to overcome challenges and get past failures is valuable, but there are other, more enjoyable ways to improve resilience in kids (and adults). One surprising way to build grit and flexibility can be practiced at the family dinner table: Sharing and teaching your family's history.

Research shows that people who are more familiar with their family's stories are more resilient than their peers, probably because of the sense of belonging that comes from knowing who they are and where they fit into a whole family unit. Resilient kids handle stress better, while adults who regularly share family stories and know their histories have better mental health than those who don't.

So dust off the family photos and start sharing some memories! You'll be glad you did.

USE FAMILY STORIES TO HELP SPARK A CONVERSATION.

Team Member Bri DeRosa shares storytelling advice and questions to get the conversation flowing.

Telling Tales at the Table:

thefamilydinnerproject.org/blog/telling-theses-table

TARGET RESILIENCE WITH ADVICE FROM AN EXPERT.

Co-founder Dr. Anne Fishel provides expert tips for making resilience the centerpiece of your family dinner.

Building Resilient Kids, One Story at a Time:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/food-for-thought/building-resilient-kids-one-story-at-a-time/

LET THE FOOD TELL THE STORY.

Family recipes have stories of their own to offer. Read about one family's use of food as a way to

share history with their kids, and try some of the discussion questions to jump-start your own food storytelling.

The Food Tells the Story:

thefamilydinnerproject.org/blog/family-blog/food-tells-story/

BRING OTHER GENERATIONS TO THE TABLE.

Two guest bloggers point out all the contributions grandparents can make when you invite them to share in family dinner.

Grandparents at the Dinner Table: The Importance of Talking About Family History:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/blog/family-blog/grandparents-table-importance-talking-family-history/

How Grandparents Can Help with Family Dinner:
thefamilydinnerproject.org/blog/family-blog/how-grandparents-can-help-with-family-dinner/

REAL FAMILY DINNER PROJECTS: THE WOODIN FAMILY

We met Denise Woodin, Director of Community Impact and Social Responsibility at the Rye YMCA, through a professional conference. Denise is a big fan of family dinners, and shared some of her tactics with us. We were so impressed that we asked if she and her daughter would like to be featured on our site! Here Denise, a single mother of a teenage daughter, gives us a glimpse into family dinner in her house.

THE FAMILY:

Denise Woodin and daughter Grace, 15, from Dobbs Ferry, NY.

THE GOAL:

Denise has been working on improving her family dinner preparedness. While she says she feels it may be easier for her, as a single parent, to get her “whole family” around the table than it is for families with more members at home, she also bears the responsibility for making dinner happen despite her work schedule and Grace’s commitments. “I used to shop whenever,” she says, “buying the same staples and then ‘cooking’ whatever after standing in front of the fridge lamenting that I only had the ingredients to make steamed veggies and frozen veggie burgers.” Determined to change her habits for her sanity and for the health of both herself and her daughter, Denise now writes a weekly meal plan and shops — “with a list!” — each weekend. It’s a new habit that she started in the New Year, and the goal is to continue planning and shopping in an organized fashion so she can continue varying meals and trying new things

THE CHALLENGE:

Getting dinner on the table at a reasonable hour. Denise says that due to her work schedule, she often doesn’t get home until almost 7 p.m., making it difficult to cook a meal and sit down with Grace much before 7:45 p.m. But mealtimes are crucial to the family: “Since I work full-time, it’s important to me (and her, too, I think) that we connect, especially now that she has homework that takes all evening most nights.” Without dinnertime as a break in the day for conversation, Denise and Grace might not get a chance to spend quality time together during the week.

THE STRATEGIES:

Because their diet used to be limited to 5 or 6 basic meals that Denise would make in rotation, meal planning — often with the help of favorite recipe websites — has helped Denise and Grace to try new things and increase their consumption of vegetables. A favorite trick in the Woodin household is to use a panini press — “they’re really fun!” — to make quick dinners with lots of interesting combinations. Denise says that using the panini strategy has helped introduce them both to good cheeses and breads that they might not have otherwise tried. On

nights when cooking feels overwhelming, the Woodins fall back on eggs or leftovers, ensuring that they can still sit down together for a meal.

To make sure that dinner is a time for bonding and staying connected to each other, Denise has found some unique strategies over the years! “My daughter has never been the chatty type,” she says, echoing a common challenge we hear from many families.

“When she was younger, I couldn’t get much out of her beyond the ‘How was school?’ ‘Fine.’ type of non-conversations. So I started asking her ridiculous questions. ‘Did anyone fall off their chair today at school? Did anyone fart in class? Did anyone burst into giggles and couldn’t stop? Did anyone trip over their shoelaces today?’ Answering these yes or no questions would often lead to her response, ‘No...but this did happen....’”

In addition to the unusual conversation starters, the Woodins have developed a unique nightly game ritual. “We’ve been playing a never-ending game of UNO at the table,” Denise shares. “So far, we’ve played 550 rounds!” They estimate that by the time Grace goes to college, they will have reached a goal of 1,000 rounds of UNO at the dinner table.

THE FOOD:

Denise and Grace don’t eat pork or red meat, so much of their diet revolves around vegetarian options, with some chicken and fish. Favorite dishes include vegetarian tacos, sweet potato pie, pasta with feta and walnuts and black bean burgers with sweet potato fries. Of course, panini dinners also figure heavily into the rotation! Denise says working hard on menu planning has been a pleasure because it constantly introduces them to new favorites.

THE TAKEAWAY:

Having good conversation starters is key for Denise, who values the daily “check-in” time with Grace. Whether using the silly questions she developed when her daughter was younger, or starting with something like Rose, Thorn and Bud to help them both reflect, Denise likes to have a way to “launch” the conversation at the table.

THE BEST PART:

Both Denise and Grace name their never-ending UNO games as a highlight of dinnertime; Grace says the games “make the time more fun and interesting.” They also enjoy having the chance to check in with one another and stay involved in each other’s lives. “Family dinner is a peaceful and relaxed time to eat a great meal and share about my day, as well as hear about my mom’s day,” Grace says.



BROCCOLI CHEESE STRATA



Make the most of leftover bits of bread, cheese, and vegetables in a filling strata that's perfect for dinner, breakfast or brunch.



Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Lightly butter an 8x8 inch square baking dish.
2. Combine the diced bread, broccoli, peppers and onions in the prepared baking dish, tossing to distribute evenly.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, cheese, salt, and pepper until well mixed. Pour evenly over the bread mixture.
4. Bake the strata at 400 degrees for 30-40 minutes, until golden brown and puffed, and a tester inserted into the center comes out clean.

Ingredients

- 4 cups diced bread, any variety
- 1 cup finely chopped broccoli florets
- 1/2 cup diced red or orange bell pepper
- 3 tablespoons diced onion
- 1 cup shredded cheddar or swiss cheese
- 6 large eggs
- 2 cups milk
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. pepper



WALDORF FRUIT SALAD



This classic salad is another tasty, easy pre-dinner appetizer idea. Or add a bit of honey, and serve for dessert!

This recipe was provided by Chef Robin. Approx. 200 calories per serving.



Instructions:

1. In a medium-sized bowl, whisk together the yogurt and lemon juice.
2. Mix in the apple, celery, grapes and walnut.
3. Serve on a bed of fresh lettuce.

Ingredients

Serves 6

- 1 cup chopped walnuts
- 1 cup celery, thinly sliced
- 1 cup red seedless grapes, sliced
- 2-3 medium apples, washed, cored and chopped
- 1/2 cup plain nonfat yogurt
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- Lettuce, washed and torn into pieces



APRICOT GLAZED HAM



This recipe yields enough ham to feed four people with plenty left over for sandwiches.



Instructions:

1. Heat oven to 350° F. Place the ham on a foil-lined baking sheet and cook for 20 minutes.
2. Remove ham from oven and spread with preserves.
3. Return ham to oven for another 30-40 minutes, until heated through. Thinly slice the ham and serve.

Ingredients

Serves 4-6

- 1 3-lb. boneless ham
- 1/4 cup apricot preserves

Cut Line



DINNER GAMES

WHICH ONE?



Whoever is asking the questions thinks of two people (e.g. Nana and Grammy; mom and dad) and asks the rest of the table questions to which only one of the two people is the right answer. (Which one got married when she was 19? Which one met her husband in California? Which one has 7 brothers and sisters?)

Playing this game is a great opportunity to teach your children a little about their family history, something research has found to positively influence children's mental health.

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INTERVIEW PLACEMATS

 Cut Line

CONVERSATION STARTERS

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