

## The Importance of Family Dinners

What is dinnertime like in your home? Does everyone heat up his own meal in the microwave at different times and retreat to his own corner of the house? Eating dinner together, for many families, has become a lost art, but it is a simple, effective way to reduce the risk of youth substance abuse and to raise healthier children.

The importance of regular family activities to share ideas and “what’s happening” is a great way for a parent to be involved, discuss rules, monitor activities and friends, and be a good role model. The benefits of eating together will last long after you meal ends, especially if you make family mealtimes a regular activity.

### Why Are Family Mealtimes Important?

- Children who do not eat dinner with their families are 61% more likely to use alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs. By contrast, children who eat dinner with their families every night of the week are 20 % less likely to drink, smoke, or use illegal drugs.<sup>1</sup>
- Teens who eat frequent family dinners are less likely than other teens to have sex at young ages, get into fights, or be suspended from school, and they are at lower risk for thoughts of suicide.<sup>2</sup>
- By eating with your children, it is more likely that they will eat healthier foods and more balanced meals.<sup>3</sup>
- Dining together is a chance for parents and children to talk with one another.
- Parental influence and involvement is an important tool in preventing substance abuse. Regularly sitting down for a meal with your children is one way to connect with them and be involved with what is happening in their lives.

### What Should We Talk About?

- Ask everyone to share their favorite part or biggest challenge of the day.
- Plan the next day’s dinner together.
- Share your own childhood memories.
- Discuss an activity the family can do together.
- Talk with your children about a book they are reading or a movie they have seen.

Eating dinner together every night is an opportunity to open the doors of communication. This will help you find out more about your children’s likes, dislikes, and daily life. Having this information can help you direct your children toward positive activities and behavior, reducing the likelihood that they will get involved with alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs.

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### Sources

<sup>1</sup> Columbia News, CASA 2000 Teen Survey. Teens With “Hands-Off” Parents at Four Times Greater Risk of Smoking, Drinking, and Using Illegal Drugs as Teens With “Hands-On” Parents, last referenced 10/1/2002.

<sup>2</sup> CASA. Why Family Day?, last referenced 9/1/2003.

<sup>3</sup> American Dietetic Association. Making the Most of Mealtime, last referenced 11/1/2002.