



# Wee Learn

Wee Learners  
(4 - 5 years):  
Tips for Busy Families



When a family is busy, one thing that can slip is the practice of eating family dinners together, but it has many benefits to your children! Researchers have found, dinnertime conversation boosts vocabulary, children that eat with their families consume more fruits and vegetables, vitamins, and micronutrients, as well as fewer fried foods and soft drinks. It is also a great time to turn off phones, and engage in conversation and share everyone's experiences for the day. Sitting down for a nightly meal is great for the brain, the body and the spirit. The following article has some great ideas and tips for ensuring that you and your family get the most of this special time together.

**Make the Commitment:** The most important thing in our busy world is to make the intentional choice to have dinner together. Some tips:

- Turn off technology: Cell phones, work, email, and TV.
- Schedule it: Like you schedule the other appointments in your life, put dinner in your calendar.
- Be flexible and easy on yourself: If you have a soccer game, bring a picnic. If schedules don't match, stretch dinner out: veggies and dip while cooking, dinner with one parent, and dessert with other parent after work.
- Keep other meals in mind: If dinner isn't possible, have family breakfast or late-night snack.

**Make it Simple:** The last thing you want is more stress.

- Pre-make meals: Cook a big batch of soup or a double batch of a casserole over the weekend, and freeze it to make weekday dinners easier.
- Choose meals that are fast to assemble: Meals can be thrown together quickly with help from store-bought ingredients, like pre-cut veggies or pre-made pizza dough.
- Have everyone pitch in: Getting everyone involved makes dinner easier/faster, not to mention more of a fun event. Encourage kid participation with simple dishes – crepes, tacos, or even a pot of chicken rice soup, which kids can add their favourite toppings to, like chopped carrots or peppers, roasted garlic or sliced cheese. Dishes with bright colors also encourage participation.





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**Make it Fun:** The more fun/special parents make meals, the more likely that kids will clamour to keep having them.

- Create meals based on favourite books, like Green Eggs and Ham or quidditch stew from Harry Potter.
- Have indoor picnics.
- Let kids choose the ingredients for Family Iron Chef.
- Engage kids in great conversation, which is always fun.
- Play games at the table, like tell two truths and a tall tale, and have everyone else at the table guess which is which.
- Play with your food: Have kids arrange salad into a face on a plate, or make shapes out of pizza dough.

**Make it Matter:** The table is one of the only places left where families consistently have conversations together.

- Tell stories about earlier times in your lives.
- Ask open-ended questions so kids can talk.
- Use real-world events to talk to your kids about topics that are important to your family.
- Tell stories about grandparents and other relatives – about romance, work and overcoming adversity.
- Make plans and dream together.

<https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/tips-for-busy-families/>

