

Mealtimes Gone Bad!

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You'll always hear Parenting Power encouraging families to spend mealtimes together, without screens, as frequently as is possible. The research stands...family mealtimes are important for so many reasons. The outcomes are stellar, and the consistent ritual adds a sense of comfort and predictability for your child(ren).

What we might not say often enough is that family mealtimes aren't always easy and may not actually be that much fun.

Both of us have teenaged kids. This means that we've had roughly 4500 family mealtimes each (give or take a few hundred).

Was each one full of polite, engaging conversation? NO

Was each meal a delightful assortment of healthy, organic, beautifully prepared and plated food? NO

Was someone from the family in the bathroom for many of those mealtimes? YES

Was somebody yelling at some point in any of those meals? YES

Was more than one person ready for it to be done? YOU BETCHA!

That's the point of this article. Each individual meal is not going to be the stuff that dreams are made of. Some will be full of laughter and some of the best puns anyone has ever created. Some will be filled with sibling squabbles. Some will have food that tasted like wallpaper paste (full disclosure, that was Julie's house and it was thrown out and we went out for pizza). Each individual meal is not going to be fantastic.

When there are recurring misbehaviours, it is time to teach the kids new strategies. Setting clear expectations and consequences that are age-appropriate is important. Mealtime with toddlers looks very different than mealtime with teens. It's a process. It grows with the family.

Looking back over those 4500 meals, some things really stand out:

We have laughed, cried, argued/debated. We have never gone hungry. The families' mealtime skills have improved. There are so many memories; a few of disastrous times, and mostly one big memory of time spent together, of feeling like everyone was coming together to check in and be recognized.

Family mealtimes may not be "All That! All the Time!" What they are is the building of family, one day at a time. They contribute to the building of adults, one forkful at a time. Don't worry about making mealtimes perfect. Just make them happen.