

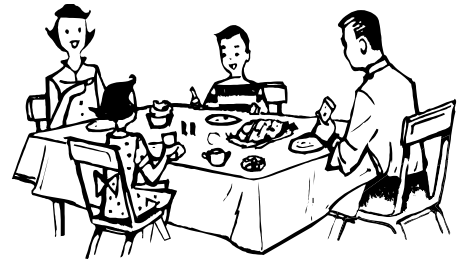


Family Ties

Family and Consumer Sciences

Family Issues

Family Meals Are Important



Families who eat together are healthier than those who grab fast foods on the run or eat in separate rooms watching television or playing video games. Unfortunately, today's hectic lifestyles have led to many families eating few meals together around the table.

In 2003, less than half of teens (42%) ages 12-17 reported eating a meal with their families six or seven days a week. Nearly one-third of teens reported eating with their families zero to three times per week. Slightly over half of children ages 6 to 11 ate with their families six or seven times a week, and one fifth of children reported eating zero to three meals with their families during the week.

Why are family meals important? Here is what researchers have to say.

- In a recent study by Harvard Medical School, children who ate often with their families were more likely to eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables and less likely to eat fried foods or drink soft drinks than were those who ate few meals as a family.
 - In the same study, children who ate with their families had better intake of several vitamins and minerals and consumed fewer saturated fats and trans fatty acids than those who ate rarely with their families.
 - In a 2003 study of teens, those who ate at least seven family meals a week ate fewer snack foods in their overall diet and ate more fruits, vegetables, grains, and high-nutrient foods.
 - A 2003 study of teens by the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) revealed that teens who ate dinner with their parents twice a week or less had double the risk of substance abuse as teens who had five to seven dinners per week with their families.
 - The CASA study also revealed that teens who ate dinner two times or less weekly with their parents were twice as likely to report that they had high levels of stress and almost twice as likely to report that they were bored when compared to teens who ate dinner five to seven nights weekly with their families.
 - Teens who ate dinner with their families five or more times per week were almost twice as likely to receive As in school when compared with teens who had dinner with their families two or fewer times per week.
- The verdict is in—family meals are important. Make one of your resolutions for 2006 to increase the number of meals you eat together as a family.

By: Denise J. Brandon, PhD
Assoc. Professor/Family Relations Specialist

Eight Tips to Help You Stress Less in 2006!



Take action.

Control your stress. Don't let stress control you. Try to identify the stressors in your daily life. Of course there are some that are uncontrollable. Put your energy only into those stressors you can control.

Think positively.

Positive thinking shields you against stress. Say each morning to yourself: What a great day this is going to be! Negative thinking produces stress. Focus on the positive side of a situation.

Control your stress with exercise.

Exercise stimulates the production of serotonin, a brain chemical, which helps maintain a "happy feeling," and seems to help keep our moods under control by helping with sleep, calming anxiety, and relieving depression. Exercise 30 minutes daily, five or more days a week. Add stretch breaks and short walks to your day.

Build a support system.

Reach out to others. Develop friendships. Always vent your feelings before they build.

Be a good communicator.

Use "I" statements. Avoid judging people. Work at becoming a good listener and use eye contact.

Manage your time.

Take time to plan and organize. Be realistic with your planning. Break down tasks into small steps. Don't forget to delegate.

Balance work and family.

- < Learn to say "no" at work. Set daily and weekly home routines. Work with family members in sharing household responsibilities. Don't forget to make time for yourself.
- < Break the tension cycle.
- < Breathe deeply when tense.
- < Learn to relax – get away from it all.
- < Keep a sense of humor.
- < Walk away from a stressful situation to pull yourself together.
- < Talk things over.
- < Ask for help.
- < Use positive self-talk.
- < Accept responsibility.
- < Get adequate rest.

by Dr. Bobbi Clarke, PhD
Professor and Health Specialist

Teen Drivers



TWO OUT OF FIVE DEATHS AMONG U.S. TEENS ARE THE RESULT OF A MOTOR VEHICLE CRASH

Occurrence and Consequences

- * In 2002, more than 5,000 teens ages 16 to 19 died of injuries caused by motor vehicle crashes.
- * The risk of motor vehicle crashes is higher among 16- to 19-year-olds than among any other age group. In fact, per mile driven, teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are four times more likely than older drivers to crash.
- * In 2003, teenagers accounted for 10 percent of the U.S. population and 13 percent of motor vehicle crash deaths.
- * The presence of teen passengers increases the crash risk of unsupervised teen drivers; the risk increases with the number of teen passengers.

Cost

- * In 2002, the estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes (both fatal and nonfatal) involving drivers ages 15 to 20 was \$40.8 billion.

Groups at Risk

- * In 2002, the motor vehicle death rate for male occupants age 16 to 19 was nearly twice that of their female counterparts (23 per 100,000 compared with 12 per 100,000).
- * Crash risk is particularly high during the first year that teenagers are eligible to drive.

Risk Factors

- * Teens are more likely than older drivers to underestimate hazardous situations or dangerous situations or not be able to recognize hazardous situations.
- * Teens are more likely than older drivers to speed, run red lights, make illegal turns, ride with an intoxicated driver, and drive after using alcohol or drugs.
- * Among male drivers between 15-20 years of age who were involved in fatal crashes in 2003, 39% were speeding at the time of the crash.
- * Compared with other age groups, teens have the *lowest* rate of seat belt use. In 2003, 18% of high school students reported they rarely or never wear seat belts when riding with someone else.
- * Male high school students (22%) were more likely than female students (15%) to rarely or never wear seat belts.
- * At all levels of blood alcohol concentration (BAC), the risk of involvement in a motor vehicle crash is greater for teens than for older drivers.
- * In 2003, 25% of drivers ages 15 to 20 who died in motor vehicle crashes had a BAC of 0.08 g/dl or higher.
- * In a national survey conducted in 2003, 30% of teens reported that within the previous month, they had ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol. One in eight reported having driven after drinking alcohol within the same one-month period.
- * In 2003, among teen drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes after drinking and driving, 74% were unrestrained.
- * In 2003, 54% of teen deaths from motor vehicle crashes occurred on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday; 42% occurred between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m..

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [Online]. (2004a). National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (producer). Available from: URL: www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars.

Talking with Children When the Talking Gets Tough

Wars, shootings in schools, natural disasters, deaths at sporting events—as adults we hope that these and other tragic outcomes will never happen anywhere and definitely will not impact the children and youth we care about. We would like to protect those young minds from the pain and horror of difficult situations. We would like to ensure that they have happy, innocent, and carefree lives.



So what is a parent, teacher, or other caring adult to do when disasters fill the airwaves and the consciousness of society?

- < Don't assume that the kids don't know about it. They probably know more than you think. The reality of today's world is that news travels far and wide. Adults and children learn about disasters and tragedies shortly after they occur, and live video footage with close-ups and interviews are part of the report. Children and youth are exposed to the events as soon as they can watch TV or interact with others who are consumers of the news. Not talking about it does not protect children. In fact, you may communicate that the subject is taboo and that you are unavailable if you remain silent.
- < Be available and "askable." Let kids know that it is okay to talk about the unpleasant events. Listen to what they think and feel. By listening, you can find out if they have misunderstandings, and you can learn more about the support that they need. You do not need to explain more than they are ready to hear, but be willing to answer their questions.
- < Share your feelings. Tell young people if you feel afraid, angry, or frustrated. It can help them to know that others also are upset by the events. They might feel that only children are struggling. If you tell them about your feelings, you also can tell them about how you deal with the feelings. Be careful not to overwhelm them or expect them to find answers for you.
- < Help children use creative outlets like art and music to express their feelings. Children may not be comfortable or skilled with words, especially in relation to difficult situations. Using art, puppets, music, or books might help children open up about their reactions. They may want to draw pictures and then destroy them, or they could want to display them or send them to someone else. Be flexible and listen.
- < Reassure young people and help them feel safe.

When tragic events occur, children may be afraid that the same will happen to them. Some young children may even think that it already did happen to them. It is important to let them know that they are not at risk—if they are not. Try to be realistic as you reassure them, however. You can try to support them and protect them, but you can not keep all bad things from happening to children. You can always tell them that you love them, though. You can say that, no matter what happens, your love will be with them. That is realistic, and often that is all the children need to feel better.

- < Support children's concern for people they do not know. Children often are afraid not only for themselves, but also for people they do not even know. They learn that many people are getting hurt or are experiencing pain in some way. They worry about those people and their well being. In some cases they might feel less secure or cared for themselves if they see that others are hurting. It is heartwarming and satisfying to observe this level of caring in children. Explore ways to help others and ease the pain.
- < Look for feelings beyond fear. After reassuring kids, don't stop there. Studies have shown that children also may feel sad or angry. Let them express that full range of emotions. Support the development of caring and empathy. Be careful not to encourage the kind of response given by one child: "I don't care if there's a war, as long as it doesn't affect me and my family."
- < Help children and youth find a course of action. One important way to reduce stress is to take action. This is true for both adults and children. The action may be very simple or more complex. Children may want to write a letter to someone about their feelings, get involved in an organization committed to preventing events like the one they are dealing with, or send money to help victims or interventionists. Let the young people help to identify the action choices. They may have wonderful ideas.

Take action and get involved in something.

It is not enough to let children take action by themselves. Children who know that their parents, teachers, or other significant caregivers are working to make a difference feel hope. They feel safer and more positive about the future. So do something. It will make you feel more hopeful, too. And hope is one of the most valuable gifts we can give children and ourselves.

By: Matt Devereaux, PhD
Asst. Professor/ Child Development Specialist

TEENS AND RISKY BEHAVIORS

Risky behaviors in teens have been linked to a variety of factors, including chemical imbalances, too much protein, not enough carbohydrates, trauma, exposure to lead, rejection by peers and television. Risky behaviors have also long been identified with family income, race, and family structure. A 1998 report in the *Journal of American Psychology*, stated that a team of researchers had linked risky behaviors in teens to their underdeveloped prefrontal cortexes.



Researchers focused on the level of brain activity in the amygdala, a region that guides instinctual or “gut” reactions, and the frontal lobe, the seat of rationalization and reasoning. They found that “when young adolescents process emotion, the level of brain activity in the amygdala is higher than the activity in the frontal lobe. However, as adolescents progress into adulthood, there is an age-related shift: activation in the amygdala decreases while activity in the frontal lobe increases,” according to the study’s published results.

The report stated, “These results suggest that adolescents are more prone to react with ‘gut instinct’ when they process emotions, but as they mature into early adulthood, they are able to temper their instinctive ‘gut reaction’ response with rational, reasoned responses. This gut instinct, combined with raging hormones, peer pressure and the stresses of life . . . especially in these times of terrorism and war . . . can reduce some otherwise intelligent teens into doing some stupid stuff, including experimentation with drugs and alcohol, self-injuring such as cutting, racing cars, playing chicken with traffic, unsafe sexual practices, acts of aggression or violence, petty crimes such as theft, etc.”

Risk taking for teens is the norm . . . it is how they grow and develop and try new things . . . risk taking becomes a problem when it becomes a way of life. Robert W. Blum, MD, PhD, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Minnesota found in the study, “Protecting Teens: Beyond Race, Income and Family Structure,” that unhealthy behavior in teens was linked to “having close friends who drink or smoke or who are involved in weapon-related violence, having a friend who has attempted suicide and having problems with school work.” Blum says, “Too many kids—rich and poor—are left to their own devices. Kids need structure to grow and to be healthy.” It is up to parents and educators and caring adults to provide that structure for teens and to help them make safe decisions.

Most teens’ risky behaviors peaks between the hours of three and eight P.M., what some child psychologists have termed the “witching hour”. A report from the U.S.

Attorney’s General’s Office states, “When we send millions of young people out on the streets after school with no responsible supervision or constructive activities, we reap a massive dose of juvenile crime.”

Other risky behaviors for teens, besides crime, that increase during the after school hours include tobacco usage, illegal drug usage, firearm “play”, drinking and drunk driving and sexual activity, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

So what can parents do to help their risk-taking teens, especially during this time of high stress from terrorism, war, crime increases, etc.? Researchers suggest that parents start by working with issues that are less controversial and threatening, to provide teens with relatively safe opportunities to practice their decision-making skills. For example, let your teen determine which after-school activities to participate in. This way your teen gets to make a decision for himself and also finds something positive to occupy his after school and early evening time. Other “safe” decisions you may permit your child to make include hair color, number of earrings, etc. . . things that aren’t life-threatening and can be easily changed. By starting with smaller decisions that allow your teen to develop his sense of self as well as his decision-making skills, you are helping him build positive lifelong learning patterns.

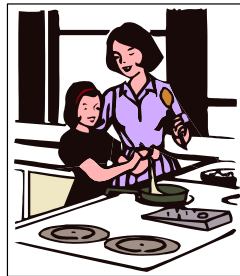
Like in some many other areas of your teen’s life, open and nonjudgmental communication can be the key to limiting risky behavior, both in the frequency of occurrence and in the scope (amount of danger) of the behavior. Most of life is about taking risks; it is how we grow, develop, explore and learn. By maintaining a positive family environment and by modeling positive risk-taking, we can help our teens through this risk-taking, prefrontal cortex developmental time.

By: Judy Cloud Berryhill, MS
Area Specialist - Adolescent Development

Increasing Family Mealtimes

Though eating meals together as a family is not a magic bullet to fix all your parenting problems, there is a relationship between eating together regularly as a family and a host of positive outcomes for children. If you would like to increase the number of meals your family eats together, here are some suggestions.

- Set aside time each week for a family meeting. Compare schedules and make an effort to block out times when all family members will commit to being home for the family meal.
- Choose nutritious meals that are quick to prepare. When you have time to cook, prepare larger portions and save some for meals from left-overs within a couple of days or freeze for later use.
- Let children select the menu and help prepare at least one meal per week. They will be more likely to cooperate in family meals if they have some control over the menu and some responsibility for helping to prepare it.
- Be creative in setting meal times. If everyone is booked solid with ball games, concerts, church, and other activities, plan a late-night meal together on Friday or Saturday, have family brunch on Saturday or Sunday, or eat late afternoon during the week before everyone departs again for evening activities.
- Be selective in the activities you choose and set limits on the number of activities that your children can participate in. When every night of the week is filled with activities that keep the family from having time together, the family is too busy. Show the importance of family by making family meal time a priority in your schedule.
- Make family meals enjoyable for all members. Don't use meal time to discipline children for behavior problems. Avoid controversial or negative conversation topics during the meal. If something important comes up, set a time later that evening to discuss it when the meal is completed. Allow all family members the opportunity to talk.
- Turn off the TV during meals. It limits conversation and often introduces upsetting images such as war coverage, murder, wrecks, and other unpleasant topics.
- Don't be a short order cook. Prepare one meal and offer it to family members. They may select from the food prepared, but don't give in to special orders for individual members.
- Avoid monitoring your children's food intake at meal time. Prepare nutritious foods and allow the child to determine what, in what order, and how much to eat. If the child is a picky eater, don't make that an issue. Pointing it out often leads to more, not less, picky behavior. If the child tends to overeat, serve the plates with servings of an appropriate size and allow seconds if requested.
- Don't insist that children clean their plates.



When family meals are pleasant experiences, children and teens are likely to want to eat more often as a family. And, keeping meals simple and quick to prepare makes the person responsible more likely to prepare meals regularly.

By: Denise J. Brandon, PhD
Assoc. Professor/Family Relations Specialist

For More Information Contact Your
County Extension Office

Marriages Thrive on Good Communications



National Marriage Week is February 12 - 18, 2006. This is a time when we celebrate the institution of marriage and recognize its many benefits to couples, children, and society. However, in the U.S., divorce and cohabitation have changed the landscape of families and left many wondering if the institution of marriage is doomed to extinction.

Research that demonstrates the benefits of marriage for children and couples may help change current attitudes about marriage. But, improving communication skills may be one of the most important things individuals can do to increase the odds that they will have a successful, happy marriage.

Here are some tips for improving your communications skills:

- Put as much energy into listening as you do into talking. Focus on the person who is speaking, make eye contact, listen carefully, don't interrupt, and make sure you understand what was said (for example: What I hear you saying is . . .).
- Sometimes saying nothing is more effective than speaking. Your being willing to just listen can make the speaker feel valued and heard.
- Use "I" messages rather than "You" messages. Instead of saying "You ruined everything, now we can't go to the concert," say "I'm sorry you were called back to work. I was looking forward to the concert. I would like it if we can schedule another night to go out together."
- Take a time-out when you need it. If the discussion is getting heated or going nowhere, suggest taking a break and set a time to come back to the discussion after you have cooled off.
- Make sure to follow through on discussions you have delayed. If you wait too long to address difficult issues, they can become even more entrenched and frustrating. Set a time to discuss them, and follow through.
- Be willing to compromise. A good relationship is not about winning and losing—it is about giving and receiving. When you put the relationship above your own individual needs, surprisingly, you will likely find that your own happiness increases.
- Be kind to your spouse and other family members. Use respectful language and be courteous.
- Catch your spouse being good and comment on it. Saying "Thanks for getting the bills paid," or "You did a great job cleaning the car," can make your spouse feel valued and loved.

Researcher John Gottman says we need at least five positives to every negative to maintain a healthy relationship. Resolve that you will work toward increasing the number of positive statements you make to your spouse every day in 2006. The outcome is likely to be a happier marriage in 2007 and beyond.

By: Denise J. Brandon, PhD
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INFANT SAFETY TIPS

Things you should do to keep your baby safe:

When traveling with your baby, be sure to use an infant car seat that meets the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards. Look for a tag or label that says the seat meets these standards.



* **The middle of the back seat of the car is the safest place for your baby.**
The infant car seat must be in the back seat. The infant seat must face the rear of the car. It is not safe to use it in the front seat.

Check the bath water before bathing your baby. Test it with the inside of your wrist or with a thermometer. If possible, set the water heater in your home to 120 degrees.

Always check warmed formula to make sure it is not too hot.

Instruct caregivers carefully. Write things down for them. Make sure that everyone who takes care of your baby understands that you have specific expectations about how to treat and care for your baby.

Make sure that you and others put your baby to sleep on his back in a safe baby crib.

Things You Should NOT DO

Never leave your baby alone on a bed, couch, table or chair.

Never leave your baby alone in a car.

Never put your baby in an infant car seat and then place the seat on a table or chair.

Never hold your baby while you are smoking, drinking something hot or cooking at a stove.

Don't allow anyone to smoke around your baby.

Never leave your baby alone in the bath.

Never hold your baby in your lap when you are riding in the car or driving.

Never shake or hit your baby.

Never leave your baby alone with a pet even if you know the animal well.

Make sure your baby's crib is safe:

- Slats should be spaced no more than 2 3/8 inches apart.
- The mattress should fit snugly in the crib.
- The crib bumpers should fit snugly around the crib. Make sure they are attached so that they stay in place.
- Check crib toys, bumpers, pacifiers, mobiles and clothing to make sure

Numbers to call for information:

To learn more about safety, you can call the Consumer Product Safety Commission at 1-800-638-2772 or you can visit their Web site at www.cpsc.gov/.

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