

Touching Hearts Touching Minds Handout #16

Set the Table (Family meals)

Counseling Tool

What is the key message?

- Family meals provide emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual nourishment.
- Family meals connect families in a powerful way.

Who should receive this message?

- Any parent.

How can this message be used?

Open:

- Parents face challenges today that didn't exist or weren't common when your parents were raising you. What are some of the challenges you face raising children, challenges that exist because we live in changing, turbulent times?
- Sample responses:
 - Unsafe communities
 - Internet predators
 - Gang activity
 - Violence on TV
 - War and nuclear threats
 - Parents working multiple jobs with little quality time with children
 - Threats of attacks, even in schools
 - Street crime
 - Uncertain times
- Suppose I could take out a prescription pad and write a prescription for something that would help protect your child from the scary times in which we live. Would you be interested?
- (Offer handout) The prescription I would write would be this: Eat meals together as a family. Family meals have enormous power. They can be the family lifeline during turbulent times. Eating together gives you and your children a sense of belonging, a connection that allows them to be strong when challenged.



Idea for a group:

- Have any of you played “Fly-on-the-Wall” before? It’s a fun game. Ready to play? Imagine I was a “Fly-on-the-Wall” during your most recent mealtime with your family. A fly-on-the-wall has a way of getting around and seeing things you might not see when you’re involved in a certain situation. What would I see or hear during mealtimes at your home?

Dig:

- How can busy parents find time to sit down and eat together with their families?
- What makes it difficult for your family to eat together?
- What can parents say and do at meals that give everyone—even babies—a chance to connect?
- Family meals can be pressure cookers or oases of peace in a busy day. What can parents do to make them peaceful, fun experiences for all?

Connect:

- What memories of your family meals do you hope your children will cherish?
- Are there rituals or traditions that you could start today that might be something they will share with *their* children?
- What are some things that children can learn from family meals?
- How do you feel, as a parent, after connecting with your child in a powerful way?

Act:

- Without a lot of additional effort or time, simply eating together as a family could actually change the direction of your child’s and family’s life.
- What’s for dinner at your house this week—and who will be enjoying it with you?
- What are some things you can do this week to make eating together possible?
- What can you do to adapt your schedules to make family meals more frequent?

