

Family dinners do matter

Study shows children who spend time eating meals at home with their family will do better academically

SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

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WE OFTEN think that school is where most of our learning takes place. But home is where the foundations for learning are built.

Sometimes we underestimate the important role of family and home in supporting learning.

We can forget that the magic of living and learning can often be found in the ordinary and every-day interactions, rituals and routines we engage in together. For



PHOTO: THINK STOCK

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instance, a range of studies show that the simple tradition of eating a family meal together really matters. Shared meals matter and the frequency of family meals matter.

When families eat together they tend to have healthier diets, eat more fruit and vegetables and are less likely to be overweight. But, the benefits of family dinners go way beyond nutrition. Children who eat dinner with their families on a regular basis have been found

to have a strong sense of wellbeing and belonging, a developed emotional intelligence and are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol.

Additional research has found that children who enjoy family meals have larger vocabularies and enhanced self-esteem and social competence. One study even discovered that the amount of time children spent eating meals at home with their family was the single biggest predictor of advanced academic achievement.

Family meals were found to be more influential than time spent in school or studying.

So what are the links between family meals and improved health

and academic outcomes for children? Family meals support relationship rituals where family cohesion and relationships are supported.

The routine of family meals can generate feelings of closeness, belonging and stability. They offer a place and space for us to share stories about the day and engage in conversations about ideas and attitudes.

Research links conversations between adults and children during family meals to success at school and to positive behaviours with others. Time spent over meals creates fond family memories that will last a lifetime.

TOP TIPS

Set a goal to take time to enjoy regular family meals and eat together at least three times a week.

Turn off the television, phones, computers and screens.

Use family meals to talk about the highlights of the day, interesting things that happened, to share ideas.

Let family meals be fun and enjoyable. Encourage your children to join in the preparation of meals, set and clear the table.

Sharing a take-away pizza qualifies as a family dinner.

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