

# newsworthy trends

## The Family That Eats Together, Enjoys It

(NAPSA)—With everything on their plates these days, do Americans have time to sit down to family dinner? Happily, a whopping 61 percent of respondents to a new Parade magazine poll say that eating together is a regular—and essential—ingredient of their lives.

One out of four families eats together every night and an additional 52 percent eat together at least a few times a week. Sundays are the most popular (76 percent), and Fridays are the least (56 percent).

That's good news. Research shows that when families eat dinner together, children do better in school, consume more vegetables and fewer fried foods, and chances are slimmer—by at least 15 percent—that they'll be overweight. Conversely, teens who have two or less family dinners a week (compared to those who have five or more) are much more likely to smoke, drink, hang out with sexually active friends and, among 12-13-year-olds, are a staggering six times more likely to use marijuana.

When it comes to protecting children against risky behavior, "The family dinner is more powerful than any law we can pass, any punishment we can level," says Joseph A. Califano, Jr., chairman and president of the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse. "If I could wave a wand, I'd make everyone have family dinners."

The most nourishing part of even the most well-balanced meal may not be the carrots, but those conversations.

"What or where you eat isn't as important as the fact that you're



**Mealtime can be a great time for families to bond. It shows children they have access to a caring adult.**

setting aside time to share information about what went on in school or at your job, tell family jokes, and focus on being together," says Dr. Harold Koplewicz, director of New York University's Child Study Center.

The Parade poll also found that 69 percent of respondents enjoy family dinners and look forward to them; 23 percent even wish they had them more often.

Experts say you can get the most out of your family dinner by taking these easy steps:

- Talk with your kids about fun times and save contentious conversations for later.
- Don't stress about what to serve. Takeout works just as well as home-cooked meals.
- Start rituals, like Sunday night chicken dinners.
- Create memories. Get everyone to talk about their day.
- If dinner is not convenient, get together for breakfast or lunch.

You can also take heart that at heart, your kids are craving family dinners: 84 percent of teens say they'd rather eat with their parents than alone.