

What's for Dinner?

By Jill McTaggart

Attention working mothers! Wouldn't it be great if the next time your child asked, "What's for dinner, Mom?" You could laughingly reply, "It's Monday, so it is Mexican!" The reality is that most working moms make variations of the same meals each week; Mexican, Italian, burgers, and pastas. What if you simply glorified this reality and made it official by giving each night of the week a name like Monday is Mexican night.

You can accomplish this in 3 simple steps.

1. Have a family meeting that outlines this easy strategy and how each family member has a cooperative role.

2. The Weeknight Menu Plan

3. Enjoy dinnertime again as a family - one of the most important parenting tools there is.

Step 1: The family meeting is a very powerful parenting tool. I use it whenever I have important news, or need my family's buy in for a change I need to make. But most importantly the family meeting is a forum for each family member to give their opinion and feedback on the change. The opinion of the children should not influence or negate the change, but it is important that the kids' views are voiced and listened to.

The introduction of the family meeting is the first change on the road to peaceful and guilt-free weeknight dinners. Let the kids and other parent know that you are calling a family meeting that evening. Have the meeting at a time when everyone is relaxed, at the dining table over dirty dishes may not be that relaxing for mom.

First tell your family why you feel you

need this change. Something like, "Dinner can be a very stressful time for me because we are all tired and I am trying to provide a healthy meal, and it is hard to please everyone. I want it to be a more peaceful way to end the day and have time together."

Second, let the family know that each member will have an important role in the preparation of dinner. The parent's role is to plan, shop and prepare healthful meals at dinnertime, not to police what the child chooses to eat during the meal. So dinner is dinner and if the child chooses not to eat that is their choice. The truth is according to pediatricians your child will NOT starve if they decide not to eat dinner. The child's role is to help either cook or clean up every night, and agree to try one fruit or vegetable that is offered at dinnertime. There will be no negative consequences if the child does not eat an entire portion of the green thing, but the child is required to try what is offered.

Finally, the fun part - renaming each night of the week so that the family knows what to expect for dinner. Ask them to imagine how great it will be when they are "starving" on their way home from soccer and knowing that it is Wednesday, they can look forward to Burger Night. Have a piece of paper handy and re-name the nights of the week together. It doesn't matter in the scheme of things which night is which, but it gives them a sense of influence on the change. Based on the most common family friendly dinners, I suggest: Mexican, BBQ, Italian/Pasta, Soup, and burger nights for Sunday through Thursday. Friday night can be "Take-out" or Pizza night as a reward, if you feel that

this change is going to be monumental for your family.

So that is it for Step 1. You have started a positive change to make weeknight dinners less stressful. Like anything else in parenting, use anything you can from this plan and scrap the rest. In the next issue we'll cover Step 2, the Weeknight Menu Plan, which will include a shopping list and recipes.

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