

Family Mealtime Matters

Focus on Mealtime

Research shows that youth who experience frequent family meals together, at least four to five times a week, are more confident and well adjusted, more socially interactive, perform better in school, consume healthier diets, and are less likely to use tobacco and drugs and engage in risky behavior. Meals together also support better management of family time and resources.

But while mealtimes provide opportunities for meaningful conversation and relationship building, it's important for each family member to be familiar with the placement of utensils to ensure the correct ones are used during family mealtime and at social settings to avoid infringing on others' table space.



From left to right across the bottom the place setting pieces are: salad fork, dinner fork, (stacked bottom to top) dinner plate, napkin, salad plate, and soup bowl, steak knife (or dinner knife), teaspoon, and soup spoon.

From left to right across the top the place setting pieces are: bread plate with butter knife, dessert plate with dessert fork and spoon below, coffee cup with saucer and spoon, water and beverage glasses.

Proper Table Setting

The illustration shows the placement of eating utensils for an individual at a table setting. The order for using utensils from a place setting should be from the outside in. In general, drinks will be on the right, and the salad will be on the left. If dessert is already on the table, it will be immediately in front of the place setting.

How Good Are Your Mealtime Manners?

Helping to make mealtime an enjoyable experience is the responsibility of each family member. Following is a simple test to assess mealtime manners. Respond to each question by circling the correct answer.

1. Proper sitting at the table means:
 - a. No elbows on the table
 - b. Sitting up straight to aid digestion
 - c. Sitting in slouched position to avoid spilling food
 - d. Both a and b
2. During dinner, the napkin should be:
 - a. Tucked under your chin
 - b. Left on the table neatly folded
 - c. Unfolded and placed across your lap
 - d. Either a or c
3. When eating:
 - a. Do not over stuff your mouth
 - b. Chew foods properly and quietly
 - c. Do not talk with your mouth full
 - d. All of the above
4. Cut large food portions such as meat:
 - a. Into manageable bite sizes
 - b. By cutting entire portion at one time
 - c. Using the edge of your fork as a knife
 - d. None of the above
5. Conversation while eating:
 - a. Can upset the digestive process
 - b. Is optional among family members
 - c. Should be pleasant
 - d. Should be led by the head of table
6. When serving from the table:
 - a. You may reach across the table
 - b. You may load your plate with food
 - c. Food should be passed appropriately
 - d. You may begin to eat immediately
7. When eating, traditionally in America we should:
 - a. Always use utensils to pick up food
 - b. Consider it okay to eat with hands
 - c. Only use hands to eat finger foods
 - d. Never use our hands
8. When sharing dips and sauces at the table:
 - a. Never double dip
 - b. You should dip and bite before dipping again
 - c. It's okay to double dip if you are the first to dip
 - d. Any of the above
9. Chew your food:
 - a. Quickly to avoid finishing last
 - b. With your mouth closed
 - c. As little as possible to avoid insulting the cook
 - d. Both a and b
10. Mobile devices and other distractions at mealtime are:
 - a. Okay to keep you occupied
 - b. Disturbing and should not be allowed at the table
 - c. Acceptable unless the meal is formal
 - d. Required for youngsters

Answer Key: 1. d 2. c 3. d 4. a 5. c 6. c 7. c 8. a 9. b 10. b

Tips on Table Etiquette

- The napkin, generally on the left hand side of the plate and next to the salad fork, should be unfolded in your lap and used to wipe your mouth and hands while eating.
- Sit up straight and bend forward from the waist slightly to bring food to your mouth while eating.
- It is polite to wait until all have been served at the table before you begin to eat.
- Don't reach across other people at the table for food or condiments.
- Don't use your bread to dunk or mop up your food.
- Don't lick your fingers or eating utensils.
- Practice using and holding utensils correctly. Generally you work with your individual place setting from the outside inward when choosing which utensil to use.
- To use a knife and fork, hold the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left with the index finger straight and resting on the back-side of the utensil. Balance the food with the fork and cut with the knife.
- Cut bite-size pieces of large food items. But don't cut up the entire portion into several small pieces at one time.
- Never talk with your mouth full, and avoid smacking and burping sounds while eating.
- Pleasant conversation is appropriate during the meal.
- Compliment the hostess or cook on the meal.

Spending time together during meals whether at home or in social settings, can be one of the most pleasant experiences for families.

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