



The Clay Center for  
Young Healthy Minds

*Shining light on mental health through education.*

## 5 Tips for Bringing Thanksgiving into Your Nightly Dinners

Thanksgiving dinner is the quintessential family meal, as we share our family traditions, stories, and experiences with one another as we bond over a homemade meal full of family history and recipes. But how can we bring these traditions and conversations to our everyday family dinners? Below are tips and strategies from [The Family Dinner Project](#):

Research has shown that frequent family dinner promotes the mental health of our children – by lowering rates of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance abuse.

1. **Don't let one person shoulder the workload and responsibility of nightly meals** (planning, shopping, cooking, cleaning up). While it can be extra work to supervise young kids while they stir the soup and crumble the cheese, it will get them in the habit of helping as they grow into more competent cooks.
2. **Encourage your kids to choose meals they really enjoy** and see if they might take the lead in preparing them—or at least join in the cooking. Even if they just make a choice, it will prompt them to be present for the meal they love.
3. **Food brings us to the table, but it's the talk that keeps us there.** Try to bring some variety to the conversation. Instead of asking, "how was your day?", you may ask everyone to describe their day in terms of a rose (something positive), a thorn (something difficult or challenging) and a bud (something hopeful).
4. **Play Games.** Thanksgiving dinners tend to run much longer than the 22 minutes that is average for a nightly family dinner as there are usually more people around the table to contribute to the discussion. During the rest of the year, help extend the time at the table by playing games.
5. **Tell stories.** Kids who know stories about their families are more resilient – and dinner is the man time we can share them. Share age-appropriate stories with your children, ranging from a favorite family recipe, to how family names were chosen, to how you and your partner met.

**Thanks for all you do to support a young person in your life.  
It really makes a difference.**

For more resources on managing relationships, visit us online: [mghclaycenter.org/topic/relationships](https://mghclaycenter.org/topic/relationships)  
Or visit [The Family Dinner Project](#) for more resources for Thanksgiving

