



Let's Table It! - Communications Around the Family Table

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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When I grew up we had several tables in the house. The picnic table helped us to appreciate nature (and the neighbours). The card table taught us about laughter and being a good sport. The dining table was for special holidays and for entertaining guests.

Our kitchen table was the most used. We always had breakfast together. Often dad would start the coffee and the rest of us worked together to set and clear items. At noon (which everyone enjoyed from 12 o'clock to 1:30 p.m.) was usually a lighter meal whereas dinner (always around 6 p.m.) was meat, potatoes and a vegetable.

The tables in our home were much more than pieces of furniture. They were our social centers where we learned about politics, business and relationships. Frequently serving a particular food led to discussion about a relative who originally cooked it or our cultural heritage. At the table we learned about problem solving and a spectrum of strategies for coping and solving daily living challenges. We learned tolerance (of annoying siblings) and proper manners. In fact, we understood what is meant by the term "family" and how to be a contributing member.

Today, many homes have replaced kitchen tables with breakfast bars and stools where people don't face each other. Dining rooms are often not practical but are merely decorative. Companionship at mealtimes is frequently a big screen television or video. In today's society, people tend to eat standing up, in their cars, at their desks or in their bedrooms. Varying work schedules can result in family members not even eating together. Singles may eat alone - or, in a similar manner to many teens, skip meals altogether. We seem to have lost the concept of "mealtime".

Psychologists are interested in maximizing health. This not only involves promotion of nutritious foods but also of mental, social and relational stimulation while eating. This week, I challenge you to set your table with the most beautiful dishes in your cupboard (what are you saving them for anyway?) Add a nice table center and invite your family or a friend to join you for a dinner experience. Prepare a simple but nutritious meal and then enjoy a couple of hours of food, fun and fellowship!

(Don't forget to turn the television off!)