

At Meals

Connect: Studies show that meals are one of the most important times to be together as a family.

Catherine Snow and her colleagues at Harvard University conducted research on literacy development by taping what happens at family meals. They found that the families who interacted with each other at meal times were more likely to have children with better literacy skills in the school-age years. Family mealtime interaction took place when caregivers extended children's interests, which helped children use language to analyze, sequence, and predict while helping children appreciate the joy of language.

Watch and listen: Do your children listen to what you and others say? Do they have opportunities to talk, listen and take turns? Do they look forward to telling you about their day? What sounds and words do they try to say? What are they trying to communicate?

Extend:

With your baby

- Give your baby ordinary kitchen objects, such as plastic cups or wooden spoons, to play with while you are fixing a meal.
- Name the foods you are eating and talk about foods your baby loves to eat.

With your toddler

- Let your young child help make the meal – let him or her tear the lettuce for a salad, stir the spaghetti sauce or put napkins on the table.
- Ask your toddler to name the foods you are preparing or to fix a pretend meal for their toy animal or doll while you fix dinner for your family.

For your preschooler

- Ask your child to tell you a story about their day or tell them a story about yours during mealtime.
- Create family traditions at meal times, such as a song that you always sing or a game like "I Spy" that you always play.

These tips were developed for Born Learning by [Mind in the Making](#), a project of the Families and Work Institute and New Screen Concepts.