

Opinions

Guest Editorial

Eating supper together builds strong families

By Sharlene Johnson
BSW Drug Free Communities, program director, Kamiah Communities Partners Coalition

The holiday season is upon us, the hustle and bustle has started. Now is just as important as any other time to make time for sit down meals with your kids. I want to encourage you to make time to have dinner together. No TV, no cell-phones, no text messaging -- just family dinner. Food to eat and conversations to be had.

I think the regular family dinner is a powerful support to family unity and to successfully raising children. *TIME* MAGAZINE reports that the more often families eat meals together, the less likely their children are to smoke, drink, do drugs, get depressed, develop eating disorders and consider suicide. They are also more likely to do well in school, delay having sex, eat their vegetables, learn big words, and know which fork to use.

Recent studies appear to link family dining to better brain development in teens. A 2005 study by Columbia University found that family dinners get better with practice. The less often a family eats together, the worse the experience is likely to be, the less healthy the food, and the more meager the talk. Forty-five percent of families who eat together three or fewer times a week, say the TV is on during the meals. Just imagine how a child feels when parents sit down to eat dinner and the TV is blaring in the background. The message is clear: You're too boring for me to focus only on you for half an hour a day.

Studies show that these kids are also more than twice as likely as those who have frequent family meals to say there is a great deal of tension among family members, and are much less likely to think their parents are proud of them.

Adolescence is a time of significant brain development and integration, especially for boys. Dr. Tomas Paus, a neuroscientist working in the Saguenay region of Quebec, has done brain scans and interviews with some 600 teenage volunteers. His studies have examined the impact on brain development of "positive youth development." He summarizes that in terms of five Cs: connectedness with friends and families, character, caring, competence and

confidence.

Dr. Paus' team thinks that family meals together can boost all five Cs and lead to better brain development, more successful teenage outcomes and fewer psychiatric problems.

It's always good to find experimental science confirming what common sense and traditional wisdom hold, and traditions of all kinds are weakening.

Children today are in an unusual state. Fewer and fewer of them are ever allowed to do anything truly independent, like walk to school or take a bus across town with their friends.

Their parents, motivated as parents are by the best of intentions, hover over them at all times. Few children have any extended periods of unsupervised play. Yet at the same time, studies tell us that parents and

children spend remarkably little time actually talking to each other. The child often gets the worst of both worlds -- parents are always around, but he doesn't actually converse with them.

The family dinner can correct some of that. Obviously Mom can't ask Junior about what he did during the day if she has been driving him everywhere, but the kitchen table can be a place where children are encouraged to be contributing participants.

The family dinner is a remarkably egalitarian institution; it permits the young ones to tell their stories to adults who listen, and teaches children (not without difficulties!) to listen to each other. The family dinner, presided over by cheerful but firm parents, channels one of nature's primal urges -- the desire to eat -- into a social grace, complete with manners and courtesy.

Family dinner can also be a regular teacher of how everyone should contribute to the family. Little children can help set the table, and older ones can take their turns doing the dishes, taking out the garbage or cleaning up the kitchen. With easy-to-prepare meals available, teenagers can help with the cooking, such as it is.

Talking about family dinner in terms of character development and brain chemistry is to put secondary things first. Family dinner, with parents and children, and friends on occasion, is for the happy family simple, inexpensive, wholesome, good fun. And what family could not use more of that?

Letter to the Editor

Do your land use planning elsewhere

Again the termites have activated. Now it's in the form of a Land Use Planning "Focus Group". I really wanted to be at their organizational meeting on Friday, Dec. 4, at the Kamiah Community Center. However, they planned their meeting at a time pretty much only retired or unemployed folks could make, from 1 to 4 p.m. with a RSVP. My experience with political groups like this is that the time frame set was not a mistake. It was to ensure not too many, if any, working people (that usually are against this kind of shenanigans) could make it.

Again, like I've wrote in numerous letters on this subject. IF YOU DO NOT LIKE THE WAY THINGS ARE DONE IN IDAHO COUNTY (Land Use Planning already exists in Lewis County), GET OUT OF IT! Anyone who thinks the same way as me, that made it to this meeting, I'd sure like to hear what went on or read about it in this forum.

Greg Heun
Carrot Ridge
Idaho County

Remember When



It's all quiet on Main Street in Elk City. This picture is dated to 1918.

Photos Wanted: *Remember When* is a new weekly feature showcasing historic photographs that depict the places and people of north central Idaho. The photos may feature old townsites, mining, logging, popular events, civic affairs, schools and sports, or just everyday rural life. Photos should include as much information as possible, such as when and where it was taken and by whom, if known. This feature will also afford the opportunity to ask the public for help in identifying a person or place depicted in submitted photos. Original pictures may be sent to the Progress but please provide a self addressed stamped envelope if you wish your photo to be returned. We will also accept scanned photos. Please scan and email at a high resolution to ensure the best possible reproduction in the newspaper. Please include your name, hometown, and a contact number/email. Digital pictures may be sent to The Progress at the following address: progress@clearwaterprogress.com or drop off prints to the Progress at 417 Main Street or mail them to P.O. Box 428 Kamiah, Idaho 83536. If you would like your photo print returned send a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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