

cubby

What's For Dinner?!



The Cubby Family Meal Toolkit

A step-by-step guide to making
kid food less stressful

19,710

That's how many meals you'll feed a kid by the age of 18.

(And that doesn't even include the snacks! SO MANY SNACKS.) If you find that feeding kids is one of the hardest parts of parenthood, you're not alone. It's a nonstop job, and deeply emotional — health, nutrition, family connection, social behavior, and so many other expectations are stuffed into the idea of family meals. No wonder most parents (80% last we checked!) feel like family food is COMPLICATED.

We believe it can be better. The secret to less-stressful family food is deciding what to prioritize. This toolkit will lead you through prioritizing YOUR top values in family food right now, and if you like, help your kid join the convo.

Then we pile on resources to lighten the lift, from new ideas for Taco Night-style dinner themes to a printable meal plan template.

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Pick 3: Our Family Food Values Exercise

The 15-minute secret to decreasing your stress in feeding kids

Um, family food values? Does an exercise on values sound a little... heady? Abstract? You really just want a recipe your picky kid will eat.

But hear us out and give it a try, because we think it's actually the fastest way to take the stress out of family meals.. Here's why:

You can't do everything. But our expectations around how we feed our kids are SO high, and kids just don't really... cooperate.

Home-cooked meals, no processed food, moderate sugar, good table manners, dinner table conversation, trying new foods, VEGETABLES. How do you do it all? You can't.

Instead, what if you picked **three things that are the most important to YOU** about family food right now, and focused just on those? It's a short exercise we invite you to try!

ON THE FOLLOWING THREE PAGES YOU'LL FIND:

1

A guide to the values exercise.

2

A list of possible values (and room to create your own).

3

A worksheet for you to put it all together, if helpful.

Pick 3 Family Food Values: A Guide

Do this if possible with your partner, co-parent, or other adult involved in feeding your kids.

STEP 1

Circle (or write down) the food values that matter to you right now.

Follow your instincts about what matters most to you right now, but choose all the ones that feel important. These could be prompted by family needs, like an allergy. They could be linked to something you wish had been different in your own food experience growing up.

STEP 2

Star the THREE most important priorities for right now.

This is the most important part! You have to choose only three! It will probably feel hard and that's OK. You should also be able to do all three at once, without conflicting with each other.

The "right now" part is important! Priorities change over time. Maybe right now the most important thing is focusing on nutrition or table manners, but after those habits are set, you focus more on exploring new things or eating meals outside the home.

STEP 3

Write how you feel when you feed your family aligned with these values.

How do you FEEL when you're living out those three values in day-to-day meals? What are a few behaviors that you've done lately to live out those values? What felt good about it?

STEP 4

Think about what you're NOT prioritizing.

What does it mean to NOT prioritize the values you didn't choose or prioritize? If they matter less to you right now, what can you let go?

STEP 5

What will trigger you to feel anxious about values you're not prioritizing?

Ask yourself, "What would make me feel stressed or on a slippery slope of fear about values NOT on this list?" A critical comment from another parent? A child's under- or over-eating and what you fear it means? How can you recognize that and redirect when it arises?

STEP 6

If these are your values, what kind of food and meal ideas do you need?

Now you're equipped to think about what you actually NEED from recipes and meal ideas.

STEP 7

Talk through these values with the whole family.

Share these values with your kid(s). Hang them up somewhere you can see them, if you like.

STEP 8

Repeat when needed!

If these ever start feeling a bit uncomfortable or out of date with where your family is at, redo and replace!

Family Food Values: Some Ideas

Here are some values and priorities you could have about family meals.

None of these are inherently good or bad! They just name something that might be important to you and your family. If you don't see one that names what you value, write it below.

Budget: We prioritize low-cost foods and meals.	Togetherness: We prioritize everyone eating together.	Time: We value food that takes a short time to prepare.
Clean Plate: The kids finish everything on their plates.	Flavor: The food we eat must taste really good to everyone.	Home Cooking: We cook most meals at home, from scratch.
Nutrition: Nutritious food is top priority. This specifically means _____ to us.	Food Waste: We avoid food waste and eat all leftovers, no matter what.	Table Manners: The kids learn table manners which means _____ right now.
Parent Connection: Parents can have connection and conversation at meals.	Kid Connection: Kids are expected to converse with parents and each other at meals.	Sugar: We avoid sugar and sweets except for special occasions like _____
Parent Screens: Parents do not use their phones or devices during meals.	Kid Screens: Kids do not watch TV or their devices during meals.	Restaurant Exploration: We eat some meals out at restaurants to explore and try new things.
Kid Autonomy: The kids are in control of what they eat.	Parent Autonomy: The kids accept what the parents decide.	Cooking Together: It's important that the kids help cook regularly.
Easy Clean-up: The meals we eat are quick and easy to clean up.	Clean-up Responsibility: Everyone shares responsibility for clean-up.	Family Life Balance: We opt for meals that don't stress other parts of our life.
Vegetables: We eat fresh vegetables with every meal.	New Foods: We try new foods _____ times a week / month.	Processed Foods: We do not use processed foods in our meals.
One Mealtime: Everyone eats the same meal; we don't cook separate meals for people.	Safety: There's a health-threatening allergy that must be avoided at every meal.	Eating with Others: We eat a meal with people outside our immediate family at least ____ times a week.

WRITE YOUR OWN:

Our Family Food Values: Guided Worksheet

A worksheet for you if you find fill-in-the-blank moments fun or helpful!

1 Circle the values above that speak most to you, and write out any others that are missing.

2 Pick the three that matter most to you right now and star them, then write them here.

3 Write one sentence about each value that expresses what you feel or what it looks like when you're living out that value.

When I am living out this value, I usually _____ and it makes me feel _____.

When I am living out this value, I usually _____ and it makes me feel _____.

When I am living out this value, I usually _____ and it makes me feel _____.

4 Write down 2-3 values you're NOT prioritizing, but that can give you a sense of anxiety or other bad feelings.

5 Think through what triggers those anxieties. Write down a few words or situations and imagine yourself in them.

Then imagine releasing each value and its anxiety by thanking it for trying to defend you, but letting it know you don't need it right now.

6 Go back to your prioritized values for right now. If these are your top priorities, what kind of meal and recipe ideas do you need more of?

Amazing job! You've identified your current food value priorities. Talk these through with your other family members, and explain why you think they're important right now.

"Food I Like" Fill-in-the-Blank

My name is _____ and I'm _____ years old.

If I was stuck on a desert island the three foods I would bring are _____, _____, and _____. My best friend is named _____ and their favorite food is _____. The last new food I tried was _____ and I thought it was _____.

My favorite fruit is _____. My favorite vegetable is _____.

If I could eat dessert first it would be _____.

The best dinner I could eat is _____.

My favorite lunch is _____.

The best breakfast food is _____.

My body feels really good when I eat _____.

A food I've never eaten is _____. I do want to eat it **Y/N**

I've always wondered how _____ tastes. My favorite thing to drink is _____. Right now my dream birthday cake would be _____-flavored and look like _____.

If I got to plan all the dinners for next week here's what we would eat:

MONDAY _____

TUESDAY _____

WEDNESDAY _____

THURSDAY _____

FRIDAY _____

SATURDAY _____

SUNDAY _____

What Are We Eating This Week?

Three easy, back-to-basics printables to keep you organized.

MEAL CALENDAR

Forget fancy meal planning apps; one of the most helpful things we ever did was start a five-minute rundown each week with the kids of what's on the menu for the week. When they're involved they feel buy-in, this tiny bit of plan-ahead time helps so much. Do we always stick to it? Absolutely not. But we hang it on the fridge and feel more organized. Worth it!

This plus the "theme night" ideas that are in this PDF have brought a lot of simplicity to our family dinners.

STUFF WE LIKE TO EAT MEAL JOURNAL

Another game-changer was actually *writing down* everything that people like to eat. Maybe I have a goldfish memory but we literally just forget about food and meals we've enjoyed, and it's so helpful to just keep a running list of what has been a hit.

WE'RE OUT OF IT! SHOPPING LIST

How do you keep your shopping list? Phone note? App? Post-it? If you'd like a list posted somewhere central, try this one.

What We're Eating This Week

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
BREAKFAST	BREAKFAST	BREAKFAST	BREAKFAST	BREAKFAST	BREAKFAST	BREAKFAST
LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER

What We're Eating This Week

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER	DINNER
BREAKFAST OPTIONS				LUNCH OPTIONS		

Stuff We Like to Eat Fridge Journal

When someone says, "Hey! I like this!" write it down here.

BREAKFAST

LUNCH

DINNER

SNACKS

TREATS

We're Out of It! Shopping List

Taco Tuesday & More: 30 Meal Templates for Making Meal Planning Easy

What night is it? No matter which it is, you could use a meal template. “Meal templates” is a very boring phrase but we’ve never been able to quite name that thing... you know, a *night*. Pasta Night, Salad Night, Steak Night. Whatever you call it, we *love* having a template for family meals and planning our weeks around them. Here are 30 good ones to help you mix it up. And yes, ice cream for dinner is a real thing — try it out sometime!

- 1 Meatless Monday
- 2 Taco Tuesday
- 3 Whatever Wednesday
- 4 Thirsty Thursday
- 5 Fish Friday
- 6 Sandwich Saturday
- 7 Steak Sunday
- 8 Stir-Fry Night
- 9 Egg Night
- 10 Pork Night
- 11 Big Bowl Night
- 12 Pizza Night
- 13 Slow Cooker Night
- 14 Chili Night
- 15 Breakfast for Dinner
- 16 Lots of Cheese Night
- 17 Casserole Night
- 18 Burger Night
- 19 Leftovers Night
- 20 Be Fun and Try! Night
- 21 Mystery Takeout Night
- 22 Dumpling Night
- 23 Fries + Something Green Night
- 24 Soup Night
- 25 Pasta Night
- 26 Chicken Night
- 27 Meatball Night
- 28 Rice Night
- 29 Pita & Dips Night
- 30 Ice Cream for Dinner Night

Based on [an article published on The Kitchn](#) by Kelli Foster. Check it out for many more recipe ideas to slot into your meal-template-night-things.

