

# Dinner Discussions

Start the Conversation About Wellness

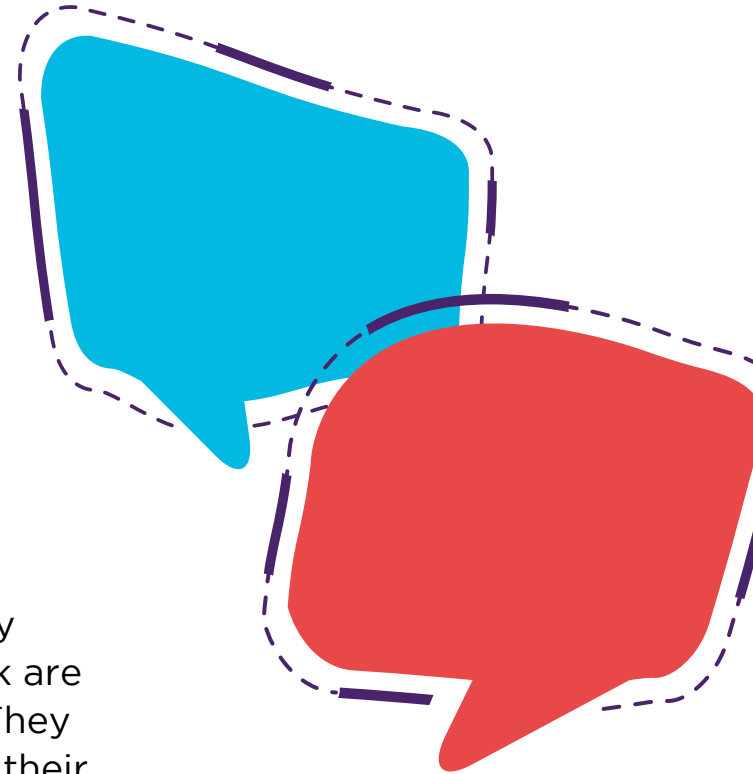
At Herren, we want to help families grow, heal and thrive together. We encourage you to make “family dinner” a goal this week and beyond. Take this time to start (or continue!) the conversation about wellness, mental health and substance use.

## Connecting With Your Kids is Key!

According to the Center on Addiction, children of all ages, especially teens, who sit down with their families three or more times per week are less likely to engage in risky behavior like using drugs and alcohol. They eat healthier, do better academically, have better relationships with their parents and peers and are less likely to be overweight. Genuine family connection can be a big part of wellness.

We know that life is busy and sometimes, three dinners a week just isn't possible, so make the most of the time you do have. Even if it's just one dinner a week.

Ask your kids how they are... how they really are. Listen and ask how you can best support them. Give advice when the moment is right and guide them to healthy coping skills to help them live well. Remind them you love them and are here for them. Sometimes, this simple reminder can go a long way.



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## Tips for Starting Family Dinners

It may not be easy at first to get everyone on board with a family dinner. Some might say they're too busy, others might "not want to". That's alright! We all begin somewhere. If you can't find time to make dinner happen, find 30 minutes a day to connect in other ways - go for a walk, talk on the way to school, even just chat with your kids about their day and if anything made them feel a certain way. The key is to start a conversation, no matter how big or small or when it is.

**Have a family meeting** to pick a day (or days) and time of the week that works for everyone.

**Set a goal** for how long you can sit down & work to increase the time every week.

**Stick to your weekly schedule!** Consistency is key and eventually, you'll create a habit and they'll feel more comfortable coming to you when they need support.

**Plan and cook** the meal together. Introduce a theme or a cuisine. Make it fun. Even have a family contest to see who can make the best dish for your meal!

- Italian night
- Asian night
- Mexican night
- Breakfast for dinner night

**Invite guests** to your family dinner from time to time.

**Real Talk** – Start the conversation on wellness, mental health and substance use.

- Ask how their day was
- Ask how they are feeling
- Check in about situations they are/were stressed about
- Ask about their friends and/or significant other
- Talk about healthy ways of handling stress
- Educate them on how substances make problems worse and how wellness can make a positive difference
- Share your personal experiences
- Keep it positive
- Be a good listener

**No topic is off limits.** Don't be afraid to talk about uncomfortable things. Create a safe space for talking about anything. Value their opinions.

# Conversation Starters

The Family Day Parent Toolkit provides tools for enriching and strengthening conversations with your children. We have developed a series of conversation starters you can use, organized by age. The conversation starters were designed to make it especially hard for your child to reply with one-word answers!

Try these out with your children. We invite you to share your successes, tips, challenges and even failures with us on our Family Day Facebook page.

## Easy Questions for Busy Families

### Elementary School (Ages 8-10)

#### Favorites

- Who is your best friend? Why is he/she your best friend?
- What is your favorite subject in school? Why?
- What is your favorite holiday? Why?
- Who is your favorite superhero? Why?
- Who is your favorite teacher? What does he/she do that makes you happy?

#### Likes

- What games do you like to play during recess? Do you like playing alone or with friends?
- If you could be a character from a fairy tale, who would you be?

- What's the funniest joke you have ever heard?
- If you could have any pet, what animal would you pick?
- What do you like most about our family?
- What's the luckiest thing that has ever happened to you?

#### Future Aspirations

- What do you want to be when you grow up? What about that makes it sound like fun?

### Middle School (Ages 10-12)

#### Favorites

- Who is your favorite musical artist? Why?
- What is your favorite book? Why?
- What is your favorite thing to do with your friends?
- Who is your personal hero? Why do you admire them?
- Who are your favorite teachers? How do they inspire you?

#### Open Ended Questions

- How would you describe your perfect day?
- If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?
- What do you like most about yourself?
- What qualities do you value most in a friend?

#### Future Aspirations

- What do you want to be when you grow up? What do you think it takes to become that?

