

# ***Food Support vs Food Police; The Role of the Therapeutic Family Meal in Treatment***

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# Objectives

1. To gain an understanding of the importance of family meals at home
2. The benefits of conducting a therapeutic family meal in treatment
3. Education on the key components and execution of a therapeutic family meal

# Meals at home as a family...



# Benefits to Family Meals at Home:

- Better academic performance
- Higher self-esteem
- Lower risk of substance abuse
- Lower risk of teen pregnancy
- Lower risk of depression
- Lower likelihood of developing eating disorders
- Parents more likely to hear about any problems that might be occurring in a child's life

# Research

- Sitting down together as a family to eat is an important factor in making healthy food choices. (Baylor College of Medicine, 2013)
- Regular family meals during adolescence plays a protective role in the development of disordered eating and weight control behaviors in girls. (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2008)

# Research on Dieting/Restrictive Parents

- Maternal weight talk and dieting associated with girls' disordered eating and extreme weight control behaviors. (Neumark-Sztainer et al, 2010)
- Parents' restriction of children's access to "highly palatable, energy-dense foods" promotes higher intake of those foods and negative feelings about eating them. (Fisher & Birch, 2000)
- Making a food's availability contingent on completion of a task can increase the child's preference for the "reward" food. (Birch et al, 1980)

# **Common Obstacles to Family Mealtime & Suggested Strategies**

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Obstacles	Suggestions
Parent Schedules	Coordinating nights when parents work late so they can be home on the same nights for dinners
Child Schedules	Limiting activities that interfere with dinner time; advocating for community and school based organizations to schedule around dinner time
Preparation Time	Re-frame this time as an investment in freshness and an opportunity to save money and teach cooking skills to children
Shopping Time	Re-frame this time as an investment in freshness, learning what foods are in season in your region, trying new stores and farmers' markets, allowing children to participate and teaching them how to be smart consumers
Knowledge and Skill	Community and online resources can provide ideas on how to prepare meals that are wholesome, yet not too time consuming



# Obstacles to Family Meals in a Disordered Eating Family

- Child dictating meals
- Parents' exercise schedule
- Chaotic schedules
- Vegetarianism/Veganism
- Focus of meal conversation is on the ED behaviors, not on the child as a person
- Dieting Parents

# The Therapeutic Family Meal

- **Purpose:** to assess the family process during eating and to help the family support the client's eating without power struggles
- **Goal:** to aid the family in creating positive support statements for the client and practice them in session.



# Who Attends? How Does the Meal Work?

- Dietitian and Therapist co-facilitate the meal
- Dispense of the treatment center's meal time "rules"
- Allow the parents the freedom to bring the foods they normally eat
- Dietitian and Therapist eats with family and client

# Therapeutic Meal in Action...

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# ***KEY CONCEPT:***

"Food Support"

VS

~~"Food Police"~~

# Client comes prepared with worksheets

## Therapeutic Family Meal Worksheet - Before the Meal

What are your goals for the meal?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

How can your voice be heard during the meal?

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How would you like to be supported at home during meals?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

List your eating disorder behaviors before/during/after meals

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

List your triggers from home before/during/after meals

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## Therapeutic Family Meal Worksheet - After the Meal

Were you able to complete your goals for the meal? Please explain why or why not.

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What family goals were established or created during the meal?

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How are you going to seek support during meals at home?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What changes are going to be made before/during/after meals as a result of the Therapeutic Family Meal?

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# Therapeutic Family Meal in Action

- Client speaks from “recovery self”
- Clinicians observe (and confront) the family, conversations/interactions
- Discuss ED behaviors displayed by client at home

# Therapeutic Family Meal in Action

- Client explains to parents if/how past statements were harmful/helpful
- Client discusses how they want to be supported by parents
- Parent/child role play
- Parents should be open and authentic. NOT walking on eggshells



# Therapeutic Family Meal in Action

- Teach family importance of managing their own emotions
- Client educates the family on their “red flag” behaviors
- Same concepts apply to bingeing/purging behaviors
- Preparing for lapse/relapse
- Dietary education

# Coach Family How To:

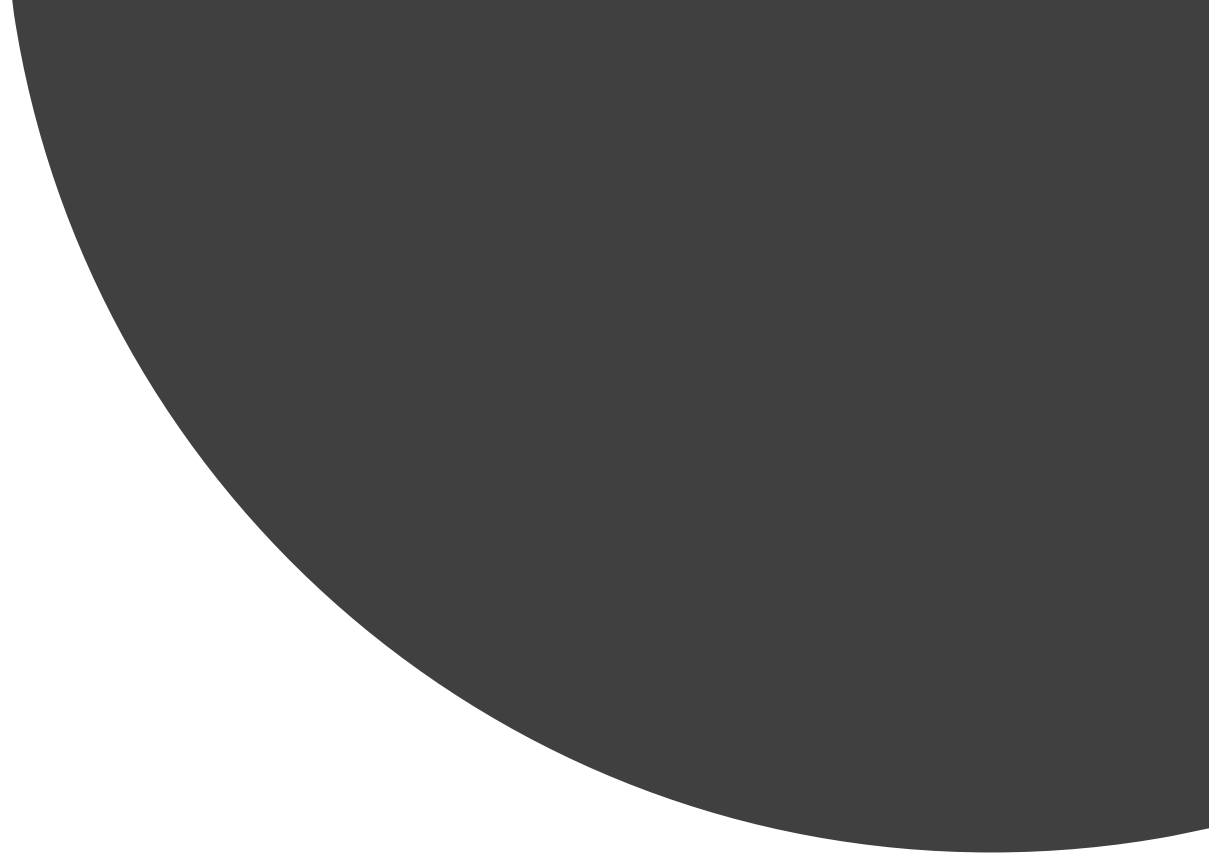
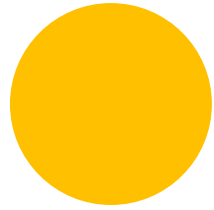
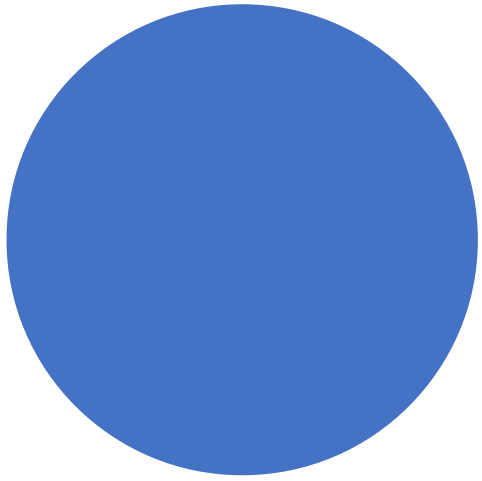
- Point out behaviors
- Focus on feelings more than food
- Share your own feelings (appropriately)
- Ask how to support
  - Suggestions: "table games", check-ins after dinner, distracting conversation, etc.

# “Therapeutic Family Kitchen”

- The client prepares a meal/snack in front of family while “telling on the ED”
- The same concepts apply from the family meal
- Educate family on expectations for client at home

## Wrapping Up:

- Hopeful/Optimistic ending to the meal
- Planting seeds – stepping stone to future family meals
- Practice by families and follow-up by treatment team



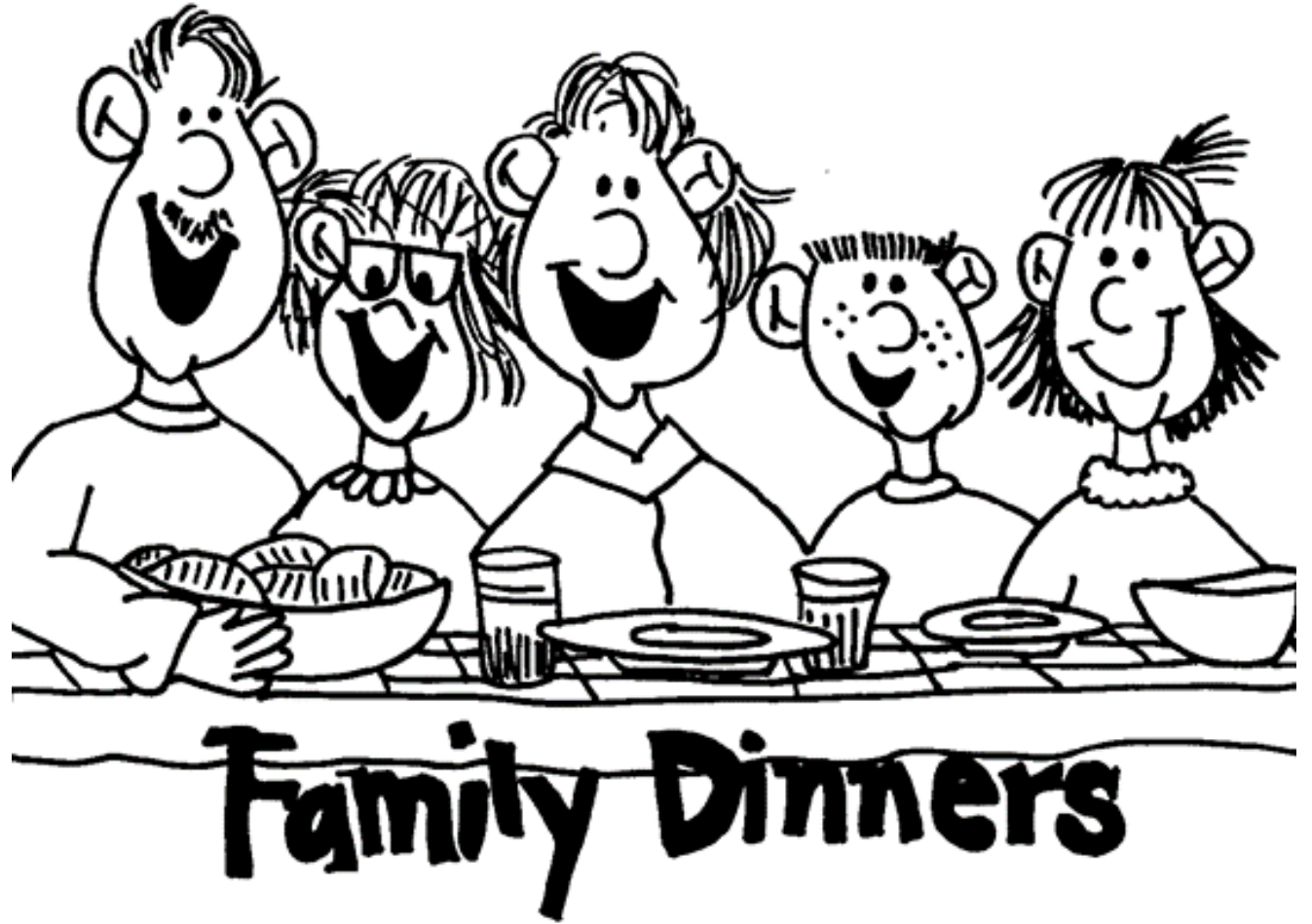
# **Mock Therapeutic Family Meal**

**[View Video](#)**



# Case Examples

**"Having a  
family meal  
can be good  
for the body  
and the soul"**



Thank You!

Questions?