

Five Easy Ways to Set a Special Place to Eat

In our fast-paced lifestyles, family mealtimes can play a very special role. They can provide a quiet place to enjoy others – without the pressure and stress of school and work. Making family mealtimes special is simple – just start with a focus on positive communication and add lots of laughter. Here are five ways to set the table for a special place to eat – at a table or on a kitchen counter.

Choose a special centerpiece.

A FUN CENTERPIECE sets the tone for the whole meal – and it doesn't have to be expensive to be special. You can use a candle (surrounded by glass when children are little), a few flowers (even dandelions) in a vase, or a small basket with conversation starter cards. For something that will make kids feel truly special, use one of their art projects.



Choose special table 'cloths.'

FINE LINENS AREN'T NECESSARY (or practical) to make family meals special – paper, plastic, and washable materials work just fine. The key to making things special for kids is to choose bright colors and fun, familiar designs. Watch for sales or markdowns on items from kids' movies (a flat bed sheet makes a great and easily washed table cloth!).



Choose special dishes and 'glasses.'

FOR KID-FRIENDLY MEALTIMES, forget breakable dishes and real glasses – plastic bowls, plates, glasses, and cups are perfect. All you really need are those bright colors and fun decorations. Children can easily learn how to help by setting the table – with the fork and napkin on the left, knife and spoon on the right, and their glass a little higher on the right.



Choose special background music.

MINIMIZING DISTRACTIONS is one of the best ways to improve mealtimes and encourage family conversations. Once you have turned off the TV, radio, and put cell phones on vibrate – some calming music can help make mealtimes special. Give each family member a night to choose their favorite tunes – encouraging peaceful instrumentals whenever possible.



Choose special menus.

LIKE LINENS AND DISHES, menus don't have to be fancy to be special. Meals become special to children when they get to help decide what will be served. You can let each person choose one dish for a meal – or give everyone a different day to choose the entire menu. For very special occasions, children can draw or print 'their' menu on the computer.

