

# *Time, Energy and Priorities: What's for Dinner?*

*By Arleta James, PCC*

Work, laundry, sports, yard work, meeting friends for dinner, grocery shopping, car repair, vacuuming, birthday parties, holiday commitments, helping with homework—where does the list end? Post-adoptive families also spend much time locating and utilizing professional services in order to improve the physical, emotional, cognitive and social well-being of the adoptee. Mental health therapy, psychiatrist appointments, occupational therapy, speech therapy, tutoring, etc. add another layer to an already difficult to juggle schedule. All children require time. The child who enters the family with a history of complex trauma may require extensive time.



As family time shifts to meet the needs of a troubled adoptee, the typical kids comment,

“We lost a peaceful family. When they came, we had to spend so much time with them. Attention to me was lost.”

“I’ve lost a lot of time with my parents. I remember my mom, me and my sisters could just go out shopping like every weekend. Now, I don’t want to be in the house. I go out and find things to do. I do anything to get out of the chaos of the house.”

“Our time with our parents was taken. My brother and my dad used to go golfing and every Sunday I used to go shopping or out to eat with my mom. We can’t do this anymore because they take up so much time.”

These typical kids reflect the everyday whirlwind that life has become from dawn to dusk. A family activity that has become especially compromised is that of family dinner. The popular after-school childhood question, “What’s for dinner?” has been replaced with, “Which drive thru do you want to do?” or “Who should we have deliver tonight?” The demands of the after-school and after-work hours are so great that meal preparation must often go by the wayside. Or, employment, athletics, math club, spelling bee practice and so on interfere with the ability of the entire family to sit down at the table—**together**.

Yet, there is clear evidence that family dinner has many benefits. Adults and children are less likely to snack and are more likely to eat fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Kids who are given time to connect with their family members

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are **less** likely to smoke, drink alcohol, use drugs, get depressed, develop eating disorders, consider suicide, and the **more** likely they are to do well in school, and they delay having sex.

So, does family life have to be so busy? Is this really necessary? A first step in looking at the use of time within a family is to identify the activities that dominate time. Take a week or two and examine how many hours are devoted to,

- sleep
- exercise/sports
- work
- school related matters
- personal care/grooming
- transportation
- meal preparation/eating/clean-up
- relaxation
- socializing
- family commitments
- medical appointments

Then, ask yourself some questions. Brainstorm with your spouse and kids as well:

Are there tasks within these areas that could be accomplished more efficiently or in a different way?

Are there areas that can decrease?

Is there anyone you can ask for or pay to help?

Do you say “no” to requests from others as often as you could?

Family dinner—an essential family activity—requires prioritizing and acknowledging that the time invested in a shared meal is a bargain in the overall well-being of each member of your family.