

Ditch the dinner table.

Consider having an indoor picnic to conjure up some cozy family togetherness. "Every once in a while we take out a tablecloth and eat right on the living room floor!" says mom Shana Lee, 34, of Hoboken, NJ. "This brings us all together and makes our girls—Alexandra, 5, and Elizabeth, 3—laugh, especially when their brother, Jared, 1, crawls around and mooches food off everyone's plate!"

Let one parent do dinner duty.

Have supper as a family even if one parent isn't able to make it, recommends Weinstein. This way eating together is more likely to become a regular occurrence, she explains. "If my husband, Paul, can't make it home for supertime, we go ahead and eat without him—but we set a place for him anyway," says Julia McGill, a 42-year-old mom in Keswick, VA. McGill's sons, Matthew, 10, and Adam, 8, look forward to their uninterrupted time with Mom, but they're glad she makes Dad part of it, too. "My youngest son gets upset if 'Daddy doesn't have a plate,'" she says.

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Introduce a before-bed snack.

It's fine to push dinner later once in a while for older kids. But as Vanessa Monticelli, 31, of Union City, NJ, knows, younger kids just can't last that long. Her solution? "On the nights my husband works late, I'll usually feed our son, Enzo, 2, his dinner around 5:30 or 6 p.m.," she says. "Then when Dad gets home around 7, we all sit down together and Enzo eats fruit or dessert while we eat dinner and catch up on the day's events."

Count your blessings.

"We begin each meal with everyone saying three thankful things," says McGill. "It can be as simple as 'I'm thankful we're having Jell-O,' or more elaborate, like 'I'm thankful that my math test is finally over!'" she explains. "It changes our focus from whatever negativity the day has brought, such as conflicts with peers or bosses, to the positive things that happen in our lives."

Get the group talking.

"In our family, the dinner table conversation often gets split in two," says Cari Noble, 32, of Long Beach, CA. "The kids—Reid, 10, Max, 7, and Miles, 5—talk to each other, and my husband and I have a separate conversation. But the activity-card set Dinner Games & Activities (\$16, un-

dreaming of an **easy,** **healthy** dinner?

Scheduling time to eat together is tough enough, but finding healthy meals you can whip up fast is an even bigger challenge. That's why REDBOOK has partnered with Dream Dinners, a national retail chain that provides you with everything you need to assemble delicious, healthy dinners for your family—entrées and sides you can store in your freezer and serve in the weeks ahead.

Here's how it works:



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a visit to your local Dream Dinners storefront (there are 206 in 35 states), where you'll assemble the ingredients for meals that can be frozen and popped into the oven any day of the week. It costs around \$220 for a 12-meal series—about \$18 per meal for six people. During September, you'll be able to make Madras Chicken Curry, an exclusive Dream Dinners recipe developed by REDBOOK. And the **first 100 readers who purchase 12 six-serving dinners during the month of September and send in the receipts to REDBOOK will win this cute entertaining set, complete with a pitcher, six tumblers, and a tray.** Log on to redbookmag.com/dreamdinners for more information.

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