

Dinner Dialogue

ALLEN COUNTY DRUG AND ALCOHOL CONSORTIUM



In This Edition

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WHY DINNER DIALOGUES

Social Skills

Social skills are the skills we use to communicate and interact with each other, both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language, and our personal appearance.



Having a solid set of social skills allows you to communicate, relate to, and connect with other people. This is essential for establishing friendships and navigating your way through life with a better degree of satisfaction.

DINNER DISCUSSIONS IDEAS

Building Social Skills and Relationships

- Talk about each family member's best friend- and what makes that person a best friend.
- What traits do you look for in friends?
- What do your children like best about their siblings?
- Who gets teased at school? Why do they get teased? Does anyone ever stand up for the kids being teased?
- Did you have a chance to be kind to anyone today?
- What are some feelings you felt today? Which one was the most pleasant and which was the most unpleasant?
- How do you usually get yourself from being angry to being calm? (Caring adults- consider offering ideas of what you do first!)
- Different people have different comfort levels of physical proximity. Role play standing too close when talking, and standing too far away. What feels right to you? What is an appropriate way to communicate with someone when they feel comfortable closer than you do?
- List things that make you each different from one another. How do these differences benefit your family? Is someone really tall and they help your family reach things? Is someone really organized and that helps your family be on time?

Offer young people some exercises to make them feel more at ease and comfortable in social situations:

If your child is going to a party or dance:

Have them set a goal of meeting two or three new people- no more than that. Goals should be kept within reach.

Teach your child how to break the ice with people:

"I've heard that you just came back from a trip to... Like alternative music... etc." Encourage them to say what they think or feel about these topics.

Have your child go to a new place with a friend.

Have them try to meet one other person together and find out what makes the new person they meet interesting. (By the way, almost everyone is interesting in their own way. It's fun to see if we can find out about the most interesting part of each person we meet!)

If the child you care for happens to be very shy (or extremely aggressive) and you are having difficulty teaching social skills, you may want to seek help.

Social skills are very important for navigating through the stormy adolescent years.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Topic

Hope and Recovery Team (HART) 2025 Impact Report

HART is a program that works with law enforcement to support individuals and communities within Fort Wayne and Allen County navigating mental health, substance use, and homelessness concerns.

A review of the 2025 data shows substantial progress in overdose reduction, treatment connections, and community outreach.

In 2025...

337 individuals received warm handoffs to treatment or recovery resources.

23% decrease in non-fatal overdoses in Allen County and Fort Wayne compared to 2024.

12% decrease in fatal overdoses during the same period.

82 visits to hotels and unhoused encampments to provide outreach and support.

924 units of Narcan distributed throughout the community.

2,760 total referrals received by HART in 2025.

The department says the reduction reflects an increase in access to resources and better response strategies throughout the county. Officials say this year, the team hopes to continue strengthening community partnerships, increase access to recovery resources, and ensure more consistent follow-ups after crisis calls.

Tips for Device-Free Dinners

- **Create a Device Basket:** Encourage children to put their devices in a designated basket before mealtime. Add a unique touch to your basket with fun decorations or personalized slots for each family member's device.
- **Use Visual Timers:** Young children respond well to visual cues. A timer can signal how long the meal will last, helping them understand the device-free expectation.
- **Be Consistent:** Consistency is vital in establishing any new practice. Make sure screen-free meals feel like a predictable part of the routine.
- **Open Dialogue:** Discuss the benefits and challenges of reducing screen time with your family to foster a sense of understanding and shared goals.

Benefits of Device-Free Dinners

- **Enhanced Communication:** Face-to-face interaction without digital interference reinforces language skills and enhances emotional connections.
- **Stress Relief:** The absence of constant notifications and digital demands allows the mind to relax, making meal times a rejuvenating experience rather than just another busy checkpoint in the day.
- **Healthier Eating Practices:** Device-free dining encourages mindfulness, helping to detect hunger and fullness cues more accurately. This step contributes to healthy eating and prevents overeating.
- **Improved Mental Health:** Regular, undisturbed family interactions at mealtimes can improve mental health. They create a stable, supportive environment where children and teens feel valued and understood.

Why Dinner Dialogues?

Consistent and open communication with your children will boost their self-esteem, improve their self-image, and empower them to make long term healthy decisions.

When they begin to feel heard and understood by the most important people in their life, they will be less likely adhere to the voice of other influences.

Youth who eat dinner with their family are less likely to:

- Use tobacco/nicotine
- Use alcohol
- Use marijuana
- Have friends that use tobacco/nicotine, alcohol, or marijuana
- Plan to use drugs in the future
- Feel depressed
- Think about suicide
- Have sex early
- Engage in risky behaviors
- Make poor decisions



Have an idea for a topic, issue, or something else you'd like to see in a future edition of Dinner Dialogues?

Please submit your anonymous feedback by scanning this QR code with your phone's camera!
Alternatively, visit www.dacac.org to find the survey.