



# Creating a Healthy Home Environment with an Eating Disorder



# Creating a Healthy Home Environment when an Eating Disorder is Present

*Have your family dinners gone from a time to catch up with busy lives to stressful, disorganized and disastrous? Does your child go from zero to 10 when you tell them what's for dinner? Is there yelling, arguing, negotiating and tears?*

This is the eating disorder at work.

*Are you tired of cooking 5 different things for all of the dietary needs of your family members? Has your child gone vegetarian or vegan? Are they refusing foods they once liked? Are they insisting you are giving them too much or trying to make them fat?*

Eating Disorder again!

Eating disorders can make meals hard for everyone involved: child, parents, siblings and extended family- even pets can sense the stress!

## **Here's what you can do to help get peace back at your family table.**

#1. Bring back or start family meals at a table. Eating family meals together has shown to have many benefits for all children including giving them structure, stability and space and time to know they can talk to their parents. Kids thrive on structure- knowing dinner will be at the same time and place most nights is a great start.

OK, we're at the dinner table- Now what?

***Let's think about our 5 senses:***

## Sight:

*What's on the dinner table? Has it become a catch-all for mail, homework, to-do lists, bills, etc? Is it messy and cluttered? This can raise anxiety and stress in children and parents.*

**#2. Clear the dinner table of unneeded items. Find another place in your house for mail, homework, etc. Keep the dinner table clean, with only the essentials.**

## Sound:

*Is the dog barking? TV on in the background? Are phones constantly ringing and buzzing? Sounds can also raise our anxiety and cause distraction from the meal.*

**#3. Create calming sounds at the table- this could mean turning off the TV, silencing phones, and letting the dog outside. It could also mean turning on white noise sounds (lots of good apps on your phone or playlists on youtube for this). It might also mean turning on music that everyone will enjoy, as long as it's not too loud and not too distracting. Experiment with what works!**

## Smell:

*Is the trash right next to the dinner table? Does it smell and need to be taken outside? Is the stinky pet at your feet who needs a bath? Consider what unpleasant smells could be overwhelming your senses and impacting meals.*

**#4. Remove any unpleasant odors and consider lighting a subtle candle or using an air freshener.**

## Touch:

*Sometimes an uncomfortable seat, tight or itchy clothes, or other tactile sensations can cause stress and irritability in children. Consider any sensory objects that could be impacting your child. Consider where you are sitting- does everyone have a comfortable chair? Does everyone have room and space to not feel crowded?*

**#5. Help your child to pick out comfortable clothes to wear at family meals (think sweatpants, pajamas, loose leggings). If pants are too tight, this can be very uncomfortable and triggering for the eating disorder. Make sure your child has a comfortable chair-Consider getting a seat cushion or switching out for another, more comfortable chair.**

## Taste:

*Last, but not least, let's talk about taste. Your child may be saying they don't like certain foods anymore or that certain foods don't taste good or taste bland. This could be true! Eating disorders can alter our taste buds. Sometimes you will see someone with an eating disorder adding salt or hot sauce to foods excessively, due to dulled taste buds. While we know this to be possible, it doesn't change how we prepare meals.*

**#6. Serve your child and your family one dinner, where everyone eats the same meal, if possible (allergies are of course honored). Think about foods your child used to love and enjoy and serve those! If you have traditions (holidays or pizza Fridays), continue those! Catering to the eating disorders preferences will only keep the eating disorder around.**



## Conversation:

*Do you find yourself talking about food at the table? How this or that tastes, if something is healthy/unhealthy? Are people making comments about their diet or foods they can't or don't want to eat because of body image?*

*Are you discussing school, college, how they haven't done their chores or other stressful things?*

*Are you and your partner getting into arguments or bickering at the dinner table?*

This can be one of the most stressful parts of family meals, which can make eating more difficult for your child with an eating disorder.

**#7. Keep the conversation light and neutral. Avoid all talk of calories and numbers. Stay away from topics that might be stressful like that big test coming up or college applications being due. Talk about enjoyable things or play word games, trivia or Would You Rather, to help distract your child from eating disorder thoughts.**

*Food is more than just nutrition. Food is family, connection, time together, tradition, social, cultural and meaningful. These tips can help food not be so scary and stressful, and instead be a part of a daily or weekly family time.*

If you are ready to get started working together, visit my website

**eatingdisordertherapyohio.com**

to schedule a **FREE** consultation call and learn more about eating disorders in adolescents.