



Family Meals During a Sports Season?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

“Like many families, our game and practice schedules make it hard to have dinner together each night. Given the importance of this family ritual, can you offer suggestions to parents who are conflicted?”

PCA Response from Joe Scally, PCA Trainer-Chicago

Research shows that there are many benefits to family meals, such as developing healthier eating habits, learning good manners, bonding, communicating, planning, and solving conflicts. Kids who eat with their families four or five times per week showed better grades, less susceptibility to addiction and less prone to other problem behaviors.

For busy families, meals together won't happen often enough by chance, so try to schedule them just like games and practices. You may have to be creative, for example, sharing breakfast instead of dinner sometimes.

Even when there is just not enough time and flexibility within schedules to allow for family meals, many of the benefits can be obtained in other ways. For instance, avoid eating fast food just because it's more convenient after practice or a game, and use the time driving to practice or games to discuss current events, school, family issues or other topics not related to sports.

Another great idea from Bruce Feiler's wonderful new book, "The Secrets of Happy Families", is sharing dessert. If the family is scattered at dinner time, serving dessert a little later in the evening will bring people together. (PCA is featured in this book, so you know it is filled with good advice!)

One last train of thought is to find other things you can do together as a family, including exercise, board games or doing chores and housework at the same time. Such activities provide opportunities for bonding, communicating, and developing a sense of family just like meals do. If you set some achievable goals and remain flexible, you'll reap the benefits you seek.

PCA Trainer Joe Scally is a longtime soccer coach based in the Chicago area. Joe spent several years as PCA's national director of training.

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