



# *The* **Table of Connection**

*by Margi Helschien*

In a small town nestled between rolling hills and whispering forests, the Johnson family had a tradition that stood the test of time: dinner at the table every evening. This practice was a steadfast rule, often challenged by the hustle and bustle of modern life but never broken. To the Johnsons, the table was not just a place to eat; it was a sanctuary of connection, values, and growth.

Every evening at 6 PM sharp, the family of five gathered around their worn, oak table, its surface a mosaic of memories. Plates clinked, glasses were filled, and the aroma of home-cooked meals filled the air, creating an atmosphere of warmth and comfort. As they sat down, the day's worries and distractions were left at the door, and the ritual of sharing began.

Eating together was a sacred act that went beyond mere nourishment. It was a time to reconnect after a day apart, to bridge the gaps that the world inevitably created. Mr. Johnson, a schoolteacher, often started the conversation by asking each family member about their day. This simple question was a gateway to deeper discussions. Sarah, the eldest daughter, would talk about her struggles with math, and in response, Mr. Johnson would offer not just solutions but encouragement, instilling values of perseverance and patience.

These dinners were a melting pot of life lessons. As the family shared their stories, they also shared their values. Mrs. Johnson, a

nurse, often spoke about her experiences at the hospital, emphasizing the importance of empathy and kindness. Her stories about comforting patients and supporting colleagues taught the children to value compassion and teamwork. Through these narratives, the Johnson children learned to see the world through a lens of understanding and care.

Around this table, the children also learned to articulate their feelings. In a world where emotions can be easily suppressed or overlooked, the Johnson dinner table was a safe space for expression. Timmy, the middle child, once hesitantly shared his fear of an upcoming school play. Instead of dismissing his feelings, the family listened attentively. They encouraged him to express his anxiety and helped him navigate through it. This practice of open communication built a foundation of trust and emotional intelligence, teaching the children that it was okay to feel vulnerable and seek support.

Listening, however, was the cornerstone of their table interactions. The Johnsons believed that to truly connect, one must listen as much as one speaks. This mutual respect was evident in their conversations. When little Emma, the youngest, excitedly described her day at kindergarten, the family listened with genuine interest, even if her tales seemed trivial. This act of listening taught the children the value of patience and respect for others' experiences and perspectives.

The Johnsons also used this time to resolve conflicts. With three children, disagreements were inevitable. Instead of allowing these conflicts to fester, they addressed them openly at the table. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson facilitated these discussions, teaching the children to articulate their viewpoints respectfully and listen to their siblings' perspectives. This practice not only resolved disputes but also strengthened the family bond, teaching the children the importance of communication and compromise.

As the years passed, the Johnson children grew older, but the tradition of eating together remained unchanged. Sarah went off to college, Timmy joined the high school basketball team, and Emma started middle school. Despite their busy schedules, they always made time for dinner at the table, even if it meant adjusting their routines. This unwavering commitment to family meals reinforced the values they had learned over the years.

One Thanksgiving, when Sarah was home for a break, she reflected on the impact of these dinners. She realized that the values of perseverance, empathy, articulation, and listening had become integral parts of her identity. Timmy, now a confident teenager, credited these dinners for his ability to express his feelings and resolve conflicts constructively. Emma, with her boundless curiosity, cherished the sense of connection and belonging that the table provided.

The Johnson family's story illustrates the profound impact of eating together at the table. It is a practice that connects us, teaches us values, and nurtures our ability to articulate our feelings and listen to others. In a fast-paced world, the simple act of sharing a meal can create a sanctuary of love, understanding, and growth. It reminds us that, no matter how busy life gets, there is always time to connect with those we cherish most.