Does Family Dinner Scare You?
October is a month of thrills and chills, when people delight in telling their favorite horror stories. While it’s hoped that the family dinner table is a place for enjoying the fun and excitement of storytelling, we all know some families who would say that dinnertime has given them a few scary stories to tell! Never fear — just as jack-o-lanterns can light up the night and Mom and Dad can check to be sure there are no real monsters under the bed, there are ways to banish the ghosts of family dinners past and make the table a fun, positive place for everyone. Here are some suggestions for tackling the “scary” situations that might be keeping you away from the table.

1. Bad Childhood Memories
You might have heard from people who tell you that they grew up with family dinners that have scared them away from the table as adults. Overbearing grown-ups, angry exchanges and force-feeding are just some of the memories on the list of horror stories. If you’re in the “bad memories” club, these tips can help you get back to the dinner table for a much better experience with your own family.

**Laugh together:** Nothing relieves stress like a good laugh! Try tongue twisters, silly faces, or liven things up with a joke jar.

**Focus on the positive:** If the mood at the table’s got you down, try an uplifting activity that helps shift the focus to the good things in life.

**Tackle tension head on:** Avoid topics that create tension (politics, grades, discipline etc...). Don’t focus too much on manners to the point your child, spouse or yourself feels picked on or belittled. You can teach manners or discuss expectations before actually sitting at the table.

2. Behavior Gone Wild
Going overboard on stressing manners at the expense of an enjoyable mealtime is a quick way to ruin family dinner for everyone. But on the other hand, no one can relax when the behavior at the table is truly out of control. Try these tips to help strike the balance between “Elbows off the table” perfection and “Finger painting on the walls” rebellion: Have children help with kitchen tasks; create meals that have some flexibility built in; let child have choices to avoid the meal becoming a power struggle; choose foods that are brightly colored; review expectations before sitting down to eat.

3. Heaping Helpings of Tension
Too many families avoid eating dinner together because they are tired of dealing with a mealtime atmosphere that feels more like punishment than family time. Whether it’s teens who won’t talk, sibling conflicts or conversations that always seem to end in arguments, any constant source of tension at the table is bound to scare people away. Explore ways to make dinnertime safe and welcoming for the whole family:

**Agree that dinner will be off limits for discussing conflicts.** If possible, parents as well as children should make dinner a technology-free zone. Initiate conversations about subjects that matter to you and to your children. Try conversation starters or dinner games to make the meal enjoyable for everyone.
Since it’s Bullying Prevention Month, let’s use our October newsletter to cultivate bullying’s archenemy: empathy. At the heart of this important quality is the ability to relate deeply to another person’s experience. So, for example, when your child sees you a bit stressed out at dinnertime, he or she empathizes with you and offers to help (we can dream, can’t we?). Being able to “get” someone—to imagine what it feels like to be in another person’s shoes—is a key deterrent to bullying. Below are ideas from Dr. Anne Fishel for modeling and fostering empathy at a favorite place: the dinner table. Also given are a game suggestion and conversation starters that help to do the same.

1. **Make sure everyone gets a chance to talk and feels that his or her words and experience matter.** In practical terms, this means that during dinner only one person talks at a time, eye contact is made with the person who is speaking, you occasionally register that you “get” how the speaker is feeling by nodding or smiling, and no one is competing with gadgets and screens for attention.

2. **Emphasize the positive.** When children share their stories at the table, point out and praise their empathic behavior toward siblings, friends, pets, and others. And highlight how others have shown empathy toward them.

3. **Try on another person’s perspective.** Beyond helping kids identify their own feelings, developing empathy is also about imagining another person’s perspective. After dinner try a role-playing game, where kids can act as a parent, a police officer or a teacher, for example. Even board games and checkers require kids to consider what their opponent may be thinking, which research has shown is connected to the development of empathy.

4. **Name that feeling.** Naming your children’s feelings helps them feel understood, and labeling your own models this skill. Tell a story about your day and describe how your feelings changed throughout your experience. When your child tells a story, ask how he felt at different points, or suggest a feeling (“You sound really happy with your new teacher”). Avoid asking too many questions about feelings, however, which can have the opposite intended effect and actually shut down your child’s willingness to share. Questions need to be a light seasoning to the conversation, like a pinch of cayenne, rather than a heavy dosing.

**FUN:**
Guess the Emotion - This is a good game to help children learn to identify feelings. Have one person leave the table for a minute. Once she leaves, the rest of the family decides on an emotion (or you can pick out of a hat). When the missing family member returns to the table, the rest of the family eats and acts with that feeling in mind. For example, if the emotion is “worry,” someone might say “I have so much homework tonight I’m never going to get to sleep.” Or you can make it a bit more challenging for older kids by allowing only body language and facial expression to convey emotion, or even just facial expression alone.

**Conversation Starters:**
As our children head back to school, they will meet people who are different from them – people with different backgrounds, traditions, experiences and beliefs. Approaching and talking to people who are different from us offers an incredible opportunity to expand our view of the world. Our conversation starters this month are all about dealing with difference – and exploring qualities such as being open-minded, adaptable and tolerant of others. For example: If you had superpowers, what would they be and how would you use them to help people? What does it mean to not judge a person until you walked a mile in his shoes? Do you have a role model who shows the definition of empathy?
Conversation Starters:

Talking About The Great Pumpkin

Last October marked the 50th anniversary of “It’s The Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown,” an iconic Halloween television special that has been a staple of the season in American homes since its first broadcast.

As with most classics, the staying power of “The Great Pumpkin” has much to do with the accessibility and timeless quality of its story. However, “Peanuts” creator Charles Schulz also managed to pack a lot of wisdom and universally teachable moments into his Halloween special. Try re-watching “The Great Pumpkin” as a family (or watching for the first time!), then discuss it over dinner:

• The story of “The Great Pumpkin” centers on Linus, who firmly believes in The Great Pumpkin even though everyone else makes fun of him for it. Have you ever stuck to a belief or an opinion, even when others have tried to talk you out of it?

• Lucy tells Charlie Brown that his invitation to the Halloween party must have been a mistake, because “there were two lists: One to invite, and one not to invite.” What do you think about Lucy’s behavior? If you were hosting a Halloween party, who would be on the guest list? Do you think it’s ever okay to leave someone off the list, and if so, how would you handle it?

• Sally gives up trick-or-treating to stay in the pumpkin patch with Linus. Have you ever changed your plans to make someone else happy? Were you happy with your decision, or not? Why?

• Snoopy spends much of “The Great Pumpkin” imagining that he’s the World War I Flying Ace. If you could imagine yourself as any historical hero, who would you choose and why?

• Linus says, “There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people: Religion, politics, and The Great Pumpkin.” Why do you think he feels this way? Do you think there are certain topics that shouldn’t be discussed? Does it depend on who you’re talking to or where you are?

FUN:

Who’s Coming to Dinner

Everyone at the table gets to pick a person they would invite to dinner and explain why. The dinner guest can be anyone from any period in time, famous or not. What would you make for this person? What games might you play? A variation: jot down all of the choices and imagine them at your table at the same time. What would they have in common? How would they get along? Finally, if you’re feeling up to it, actually invite someone to dinner!
Recipe of the Month

Quinoa Chia Seed Protein Bars

½ c Dry Quinoa
½ c Chia Seeds
2 Tbls Ground Flax Seeds
1 c Rolled Oats
¼ tsp Salt
1 tsp Cinnamon
1 tsp Cardamom
½ c Raw Almonds, coarsely chopped
2 Tbls Honey
¼ c Brown Rice Syrup
½ c Nut Butter

Preheat oven to 350°. In bowl mix first eight (8) ingredients. In small bowl mix honey, rice syrup & nut butter then microwave for 1 minute. Pour wet ingredients over dry ingredients & mix well. Transfer to parchment lined 8 x 8 inch pan and pat down to make even. Bake 15 minutes. Cool 10 minutes. After 10 minutes remove bars from pan by lifting parchment. Cool on wire rack. Cut to make bars. Store in refrigerator.

October

Domestic Violence Awareness Month
www.ncadv.org

National Breast Cancer Awareness Month
www.cancer.org

National Bullying Prevention Month
www.pacer.org/bullying/nbpm

Sudden Infant Death Awareness Month
safetosleep.nichd.nih.gov

Run/Walk Events

Komen Central Valley Race for the Cure
Oct 1 ~ Chuckchansi Park
http://www.info-komen.org

Fowler Fall Festival Fun Run
Oct 7 ~ Fowler Panzak Park
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fowler/FowlerFallFestivalFunRunWalk

Monster Mash Halloween Run
Oct 28 ~ Woodward Park
http://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fresno/MonsterMashDashHalloweenRun

Two Cities Marathon
Nov 5 ~ Woodward Park
http://www.twocitiesmarathon.com

San Joaquin River Trail Run
Nov 18 ~ Milerton Lake/San Joaquin River

Fresno Turkey Trot
Nov 23 ~ Woodward Park
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fresno/SierraChallengeExpressTurkeyTrot

The Super Run 5K
Dec 2 ~ Woodward Park
http://thesuperrun.com/locations/fresno-ca-superhero-5k-run/

Fresno Jingle Bell Run – Toys for Tots
Dec 9 ~ Palm and Shaw
https://runsignup.com/Race/CA/Fresno/JingleBellRunforToysforTots

October Birthdays

Oct 2 – Edubina Avila
Oct 22 – Kathleen Harriss
Oct 27 – Florinda Martinez

Happy Birthday

Kimberly Wiser-Daggs, RD
daggsk@unitedhealthcenters.org

Katie Mendez, DN
mendezk@unitedhealthcenters.org