

Happiness is Harmony

~ Saheli Sheth (Peoria, USA)

“It is a blessing to eat dinner with your family.”

~ Sadguru Sant Param Pujya Ashvindada

I remember being confused by what he meant. Because of my privilege, I had assumed it was normal for families to eat together every day. I became curious about my psychotherapy clients and their quality time with their families, and I started asking them how they spent their mealtimes. To my surprise, out of the 25 families I worked with, only one stated that they ate dinner together.

There are many constraints to sitting together for a meal, such as working different shifts, having kids who have moved out, having an unsupportive spouse, living alone, or feeling overwhelmed and always on the go. Still, it's worth exploring the connection between these clients with mental health concerns, and the lack of time they get to spend with their families.

If family disconnection is correlated with lower mental health, then the opposite is also true: Family connection is a cornerstone to feeling loved, joyful, and emotionally well. As adults, we have the strength to take the first step to invest quality time and connect with our kids.

Through tangible steps, Sadguru Sant Param Pujya Manojdasji shared his guidance on what we can do to attain family harmony:

1. Share one meal together each day.

- * We will see the most benefit if this is done **without** everyone on their phones or watching TV while eating. Family harmony doesn't come from simply living under the same roof, or even by just sitting together while eating. It's made by the conscious decision to be present for one another.

2. After eating, engage in the Swaminarayan Mahamantra for 15 minutes together.

- * The power of prayer is such that we will start to see positive changes by this step alone.

3. For another 15 minutes, invite each person to share something positive they've noticed about another family member in the last 24 hours.

- * In this way, kids and their care givers can both practice being more appreciative of one another.
- * Think about the long-term benefit - at the end of the year, this means we will have found 365 positive qualities of one another!
- * If it's challenging to think of positive qualities, then we may share anything positive that has happened in our lives in the past 24 hours – for example, something nice at school or with friends, an accomplishment at work, or even simply appreciation for the weather. Over 365 days, we will be amazed by its impact on our thought processes.

Even though there may be very reasonable barriers to spending consistent family time, why is it still so important to prioritize? In a popular TED Talk, Johann Hari shares why we get addicted (including smart phone addiction). I had goose bumps when I heard his last statement:

“The opposite of addiction... is connection.”

This means that if connection prevents addiction to devices, then disconnection fuels it. Simply put, our kids become glued to their screens when they feel disconnected from others around them.

Parenting coach Marko Juhant shared that we have two solutions, then, to our kids' addiction to devices :

- (1) build a deep connection with our kids, and
- (2) make the real world more interesting than the virtual world.

Pujya Manojdasji's three suggestions for spending daily family time allow us to work toward this connection. And where there's connection, there's family harmony. ◆