



Candles at Dinner



When I finally realized the emotional and spiritual benefits of family dinner—I was in my 40's—I tried to make dinner even more meaningful and special. I decided to try making our regular dinners into candlelit dinners. We lit little tea votives on the dinner table when fall and winter came and even through the spring. It was too bright in the summer at dinnertime, but candles at dinner, as the world got chillier in Utah, extended dinner and made it much more fascinating. It changed the ordinary to spellbinding. The soft light helped us to relax and talk more. The candles suspended time and rewarded us for making the effort to gather. The darkness shrouding us and our table being an oasis of light made us feel cozy and always helped us stay longer and talk.

Our children took turns blowing out the candles. Because we wanted to have enough candles so that we could turn off the lights and still see, we always had many votives lit, so there were always enough candles for everyone to blow out their own. The smaller candles didn't produce as much wax, which is a tempting substance for little fingers. However, we had boundaries with the candles or it would have ruined the experience. There was no blowing out of candles or playing with the candles while they were lit. Our children could dip their fingers in

the wax after the candles had been blown out. They loved doing that and then peeling off the circles of wax from their fingers.

I was asked to teach a class on the importance of dinner. Afterward, I was talking with a young mother and she said, “My children would just blow them out and then want to light them again, and then they start fighting over who gets to light them.” This very well could happen at first! But, if they blow them out too early, then you can say regretfully, “Oh no! If we are going to blow out the candles, then no more candles tonight. We can try again tomorrow to see if we can keep them lit longer.” There is something very jarring about eating by the soft glow of candlelight and then having the glaring overhead lights go on again. Parenting has to be a win-win for me. If I put the work into dinner, then I want it to be enjoyable.

Candles cast a special glow across our tables making each meal a feast. As you seek to make dinnertime a respite from a busy day like I tried to do, I think you will find that candlelight helps us look better, feel better, and creates a soft and special mood that we want to keep creating with our children.

For further discussion on this practice, see:

Elizabeth Foss, “Candlelight at the Table,” *In the Heart of My Home: Journal*, 26 Jan. 2011, www.elizabethfoss.com/journal/reallearning/2011/01/candlelight-at-the-table.html.