

Let's Talk Tablemat 101: Family Meals, Conversation, PCC & More



The [Let's Talk Tablemat™](#) is a tool for families to use during shared meals to encourage conversation. It features 24 open-ended questions (in English or Spanish) that anyone from age 2 or 3 and older may ask and answer. Questions are thematic and broad, broaching subjects such as health, love, respect, gratitude, parenting, self-image and friendship. While using the Tablemat can be a lighthearted activity for families, parents may also use the questions on the tablemat as “door openers” to explore a wide variety of issues, values, and concerns.

Meaningful conversations during a shared family activity, such as mealtime, are extremely valuable. Thoughts shared are revealing as family members talk about daily highs and lows, favorite things, and hopes for the future. Parents may find themselves enjoying insight into their children's developing sense of self, and children may begin to see their parents outside the roles of mom or dad. Increased feelings of warmth and trust are often a result of such conversations and contribute to an environment in which family members seek each other out when challenges surface. Open channels of communication give parents natural opportunities to talk about their values. And kids are more receptive to what their parents have to say when they feel more connected to them.

A shared meal, especially if there is conversation to go along with it, allows families to experience many of the elements that must be in place to support Parent-Child Connectedness (PCC): time spent together, structure, communication, and a basic sense of trust. PCC is defined as “a condition characterized by the quality of the emotional bond between parents (or those with a parenting role) and their children, and by the degree to which this bond is both mutual and sustained over time.” It is known in the public health world as a “super protector,” buffering adolescents from the many challenges and risks they face. Strong PCC protects against 33 adverse adolescent outcomes such as unintended pregnancy; HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs); violence; depression; eating disorders; alcohol, tobacco and drug use; and poor academic achievement. (For more on PCC please see ETR Associate's [ReCAPP website](#).) In addition to PCC overall, research on eating habits in particular shows that families who regularly share meals contribute to the health and well-being of their children in many of the same ways PCC does.

Let's Talk Month is celebrated nationwide every October to encourage parent-child communication about sexuality. While the Tablemat does not focus on sexuality specifically, conversations may lead to topics pertaining more directly to sexuality, such as sexual behavior and expression, values, relationships, identity and gender roles. For parents seeking more information about how to talk about these topics with their children, the following online resources may be helpful:

[Planned Parenthood's Tools for Parents](#)

[Advocates for Youth Parents' Sex Ed Center](#)

[Parent-Child Connectedness in Our Communities](#) (PDF)

[Parentfurther](#)

Let's Eat, Let's Talk . . . Let's See Where It Takes Us!™