

Anecdotes: Realities of Shabbat Dinner with Families

Shabbat Dinner isn't about creating a Norman Rockwell scene of what Shabbat dinner is "supposed to be." Shabbat is about moments of meaning and joy for each family that works for them at that time. Shabbat is accepting this gift and call from Judaism: put aside the to do list for now, sit down together, enjoy your family, hug each other, talk to each other, use these Shabbat rituals to create these sacred moments.

Here's how Shabbat looks for these families. They focused on their family goals--to enjoy their Shabbat rituals and family time. What do you relate to about these anecdotes? What aspects would work for your family? What do you see as obstacles and how might you overcome them?

"Shabbat Shalom from the Kitchen Floor" from *Jewish Spiritual Parenting*, p.173

Noah was teething and not yet crawling; Rachel was five, and Daniel was three. It was Friday night, and after a full week of work, neither of us had the oomph for cooking or setting a special table, yet we relished the candlelight and wanted to keep our Shabbat family ritual.

Paul ordered a pizza and we slid to the kitchen floor for an impromptu picnic. Daniel grinned while sitting atop Paul's shoulders, and Noah snuggled into Michelle. Rachel swung her legs from her perch on the counter. We lit the candles, and the older kids led us in the ritual of closing our eyes and circling our hands three times. They explained proudly they learned in temple nursery school that we were bringing three rings of blessings—light, warmth, and love—toward our faces. Nestled close to one another we sang a boisterous *Kiddush* over the grape juice and *Hamotzi* over the challah. Daniel danced to the melodies, while Rachel belted out the words with confidence. Noah grinned and drooled. We blessed our children and each other with *Birkat Kohanim* (the Priestly Blessing), all the while struggling to keep from bursting out with laughter at the decidedly unorthodox setting. Pizza on paper plates with tomato sauce dripping everywhere made the moment especially delicious. We gave the kids a quick bath, slipped on their pajamas, put them in their beds, and collapsed beside each other on our bed.

We routinely welcomed Shabbat on Friday nights with the traditional rituals but on that particular night, Shabbat never seemed sweeter. The impromptu informality of the kitchen floor picnic felt just right for our young family.

During the week we don't always have time for the kids to share their projects from school. On Shabbat our kids put their projects on the dinner table, so they can share them with the family. We put our phones away and give the kids undivided attention during the dinner.

When our child is practicing her Torah reading for an upcoming youth service, she also reads it during Shabbat dinner for the family.

Abby Reiken: We love making challah for Shabbat. On Thursday night we make the dough to proof overnight in the fridge. On Friday after school, we finish preparing the challah. We love to add chocolate or cinnamon sugar to our challah. We freeze half of the challah for another night, when we're too busy to make challah. My oldest daughter has continued this challah making tradition in her college dorm and during her summer internship in Israel. We text her the Shabbat blessing for children, and she sends us pics of her challah. For the Jewish holidays we make our challah into shapes--a shofar, Jonah and the whale, lulav and etrog, and Jewish star.

After each of our daughter's became Bat Mitzvah, they started to light Shabbat candles with me. They each picked out their new, unique Shabbat candle holders. My husband led us in *Shehechyanu* (a blessing to acknowledge special moments), as our youngest daughter prepared to light candles with us.