

## THE UNSTABLE FAMILY TABLE

Madison loved sharing with her parents every detail of her day. She loved telling them about the school drama, the latest chapter she read in a book, and just about everything she heard and saw. To say that she was chatty was an understatement. Madison's favorite time of day was dinner. The table transformed into her stage to perform and present her findings. Her parents applauded and cheered as she retold stories. Everyone sat around the table, passed dishes, and swapped stories. They were a close-knit family and Madison felt grateful she had such encouraging parents.

The past few weeks had been different though. Her mom was working on an important project for work and had her computer out at dinner and her dad couldn't go five minutes without refreshing his email on his phone. They both looked more stressed than usual and complained that work had never been worse. As Madison started to talk, she noticed no one was listening. Occasionally they nodded or said, "Wow that's interesting." Madison was frustrated at this recent change and decided to test them one day.

"During class, I cheated on my test and my teacher suspended me from school!" Madison suggested.

"That's great, honey." Her dad responded while staring at the cell phone in his lap.

"Mhmm." Her mom agreed.

Madison was furious. This family time had turned into technology time. She grabbed her plate and marched up to her room to finish dinner.

Later that night, Madison's parents came into her room. They apologized for not listening and explained that work has gotten very busy for both of them. They explained that they didn't have the luxury of stopping work for dinner but promised to be better listeners.

## THE UNSTABLE FAMILY TABLE

Madison didn't believe them. The next few nights she took dinner to her room and ate alone. Her nightly chore was washing the dishes, but Madison now refused. She used a paper plate for dinner instead. She believed that she shouldn't have to do her family duty if her parents weren't doing theirs.

As Madison's parents' jobs became busier, Madison grew more frustrated. Family dinner hadn't happened in over one month. Everyone felt more stressed, aggravated, and less connected to one another.

# THE UNSTABLE FAMILY TABLE

## Guiding Questions:

- Why did Madison feel the way she did? Have you ever felt this way? What happened?
- What would you do if you were a parent and had a busy schedule? How could Madison's parents solve the problem?
- What rules and routines does your family have around technology? How did you come up with these rules?

**Topic: Media Balance and Dynamics, Relationships and Communication**

**Age: Elementary and Middle School**