



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**The Town of New Canaan's Youth and Family Services has teamed up with other Asset Building Organizations to announce the sixth consecutive April is 30 Days of Family Month in New Canaan. As we experience this new norm in our life and navigating new challenges, let's come together to focus on family.**

**This April we have joined forces with the Chamber of Commerce, Silver Hill Hospital, The Ram Council, The New Canaan YMCA, New Canaan CARES, The New Canaan Library, The New Canaan Nature Center, Grace Farms Foundation, St Marks, St Aloysius, The New Canaan Community Foundation, The Congregational Church, LiveGirl, Kids in Crisis and Young Women's League to Celebrate Tech Free Family Time to the best of our ability.**

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The newest community partner to join us is Live Girl. Founder and CEO Sheri West says as the parent of three teenagers "In today's digital world, it's especially important that parent's preserve tech free family time and model the importance of In Real Life (IRL) connections. This might just be the crucial time that your child needs to regroup and refocus on his/her mental health. "

With routines disrupted and families thrown into close quarters, cabin fever is a real factor. **We urge families to make the most of Family Dinner Time. It Makes a Difference! Being Tech Free during this time makes a bigger difference-**Making dinner and family quality time in general a tech-free zone if possible. This will open up time for conversations and promotes eye contact not iContact. I know right now school aged kids and all of us are seeing our screen time increase for online meetings, school, and to keep us connected to our family and friends, however meal time can still be screen free time and unplugging during family games or puzzles or outdoor activities will help everyone feel refreshed and present. **Family dinner is an institution.** Families that eat dinner together five or more times a week have children 33% less likely to use alcohol or drugs.

- **Dinner is a time for sharing.** Almost all (93 percent of) parents think conversations at family dinners are important for talking about things happening in their children's lives.
- **Devices aren't welcome but often have a seat at the table anyway.** Even though previous research has found that 88 percent of adults don't think it's OK to use a phone at a family dinner, 47 percent of parents said they or a family member used a mobile device at dinner in the last week. Thirty-four percent said they had the TV on for all or most dinners.

The Initiative, now in its sixth year, is inspired by “Family Day,” a national movement that informs parents that the engagement fostered during frequent family dinners is an effective tool to help keep America’s kids’ substance free and healthy.

Joyce Sixsmith, President Ram Council Foundation finds when working with her teens that "Family dinners have proven to serve as a great source of substance abuse prevention for youth. These meals can offer a place of love, bonding and safety for parents to "check in" with their kids.

Encouraging families to eat together and spend more time with each other is in line with the 40 Developmental Assets presented by the Search Institute. Additionally, according to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA), compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven per week), those who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are:

- Almost four times likelier to use tobacco;
- More than twice as likely to use alcohol;
- Two-and-a-half times likelier to use marijuana; and
- Almost four times likelier to say they expect to try drugs in the future.

Jacqueline D’Louhy, LCSW and Coordinator of Youth and Family Services for the town of New Canaan added, **“Unplugging gets families to actually talk to each other—With their voices and spend quality time making eye contact and practicing listening skills!** Think about how much teens “talk” to each other electronically. Sometimes they’ll be sitting in the same room but never utter a word to one another. This is hurting social skills and communication, which are essential building blocks for long-term success. We need adults to help our youth model this behavior because we are not the best at unplugging ourselves especially now during a time we feel less creative with how to occupy our free time”.

**Lastly, we were hoping to kick off our 30 Days of Family Initiative this year at New Canaan High School and Saxe Middle School lunch blocks. We created Take the Tech Free Challenge bracelets to be given out to all students from grades 5-12. Since school is out till at least April 20<sup>th</sup>, we hope to connect with our local students and families when our social distancing is over and hear how everyone managed during this**

**difficult time and preserved the most important asset and that is FAMILY TIME. I just want the community to know that “it’s okay to not feel okay right now this is not normal for any of us so please be kind to yourself and your family”.**

Please visit <http://newcanaanchamber.com/30-days-of-family/> to know more about all of the fun, family activities to do at home and great conversation starters during mealtime.