

The After-School Squeeze Eating into Family Meal Times

New research shows almost 50% of UK parents feel the pressure to sign their kids up for extra-curricular activities as children head back to school, but it's impacting their time around the dinner table



Kate Ferdinand joins HelloFresh to encourage families to set aside one night dedicated to family dinner.

Images HERE: <http://bit.ly/4orwa6W>

- *Child therapist and parenting expert Kate Silvertown says the simple act of sharing a meal can be as developmentally valuable as music lessons or sports clubs*
- *Kate Ferdinand joins forces with HelloFresh to encourage families to swap one after-school activity for a midweek meal*

London, 19th August 2025 – Parents across the UK are facing a modern back-to-school dilemma: how to balance ‘The After School Squeeze’ without compromising important shared meal times as a family.

New research* from HelloFresh reveals that almost one in three (31.8%) say their children’s hobbies and club schedules make it difficult to share dinner together midweek, with busy work schedules (51.7%) the biggest disruptor - highlighting the pressures parents are facing as they prepare to send their children back to school.

Family dinners are already under pressure: nearly a quarter (24%) of households manage fewer than three shared dinners a week during term time. The research shows this situation worsens once school term begins again, with 62% of parents saying mealtimes feel “more squeezed” during

term time, with kids spending more time after-school clubs than shared, focussed mealtimes together¹.

After-school schedules are busier than ever, with 45.6% of children now enrolled in three or more clubs. What's more, nearly half of parents (47.8%) admit feeling pressure from peers, social expectations, and even school culture to sign their children up to more. Nearly two-thirds of parents (57.9%) admit they do so to ensure better future prospects for their children.

Despite this, over half of parents (55%) agree that shared mealtimes are beneficial for children's development and 54% would be willing to drop a club for more time around the dinner table together.

To help families harness the power of shared mealtimes, HelloFresh has partnered with former BBC journalist turned child therapist **Kate Silverton**, who says evidence shows family dinners can be just as powerful for children's development as any club or class.

"Just one shared meal a week – whether it's cooking, chatting, or clearing up – helps children build everything from confidence to communication skills, while strengthening emotional bonds and supporting mental well-being," says Kate Silverton.

"Family meals don't just nourish the body — they nurture vital life skills, from turn-taking and listening to problem-solving, empathy, and emotional regulation. Even twenty minutes at the table gives children space to practise language, grow their vocabulary, and strengthen their sense of belonging.

Extensive research has shown that shared mealtimes offer parents and children the chance to reconnect in the middle of a busy week and are associated with higher academic achievement, enhanced reading and vocabulary skills and problem solving - so parents can feel reassured they're doing right by their children making the time for shared meals."

Research shows that even brief moments around the table - prepping, eating, or simply talking—can significantly boost child development. Just five additional minutes of shared dinnertime increases the likelihood of children developing lifelong healthy eating habits. And conversation at the table has been shown to improve vocabulary seven times more than just reading alone.

HelloFresh has also teamed up with mum and step-mum Kate Ferdinand to encourage families to set aside one evening a week to cook and eat a meal together: *"Rio and I love to have dinner together with our family. Although it can be tough to make time midweek, particularly with everyone's different schedules, we see so much value when we do. That's why I am so happy to partner with HelloFresh to make it even easier for families to come together."*

¹ 104 vs 168 mins per week

To make family dinners without the ‘squeeze’ feel more achievable in busy households, Kate Silverton recommends:

- **Claim one night for connection**

Turn mealtimes into a weekly ritual the whole family comes to expect — with one evening set aside for “family time.” Try to protect this space as you would a sports match or a work meeting, although accept the day or time might have to shift occasionally.

- **Involve the kids**

Let children help choose the menu for the night or even plan a theme. Giving them a say increases buy-in — and supports confidence, creativity, and planning skills.

- **Share the load**

Everyone can help — whether it’s laying the table, stirring a sauce, or stacking the dishwasher afterwards. Shared tasks build teamwork and reduce pressure on parents.

- **Be present**

Putting phones away helps to open up real conversations. Rather than asking “How was your day?” We can use open questions like “What made you smile today?” or “What was the best and worst part of your day?” These questions often spark richer and more meaningful answers.

- **Keep it simple**

Focus on fuss-free food. Choose meals that take 30 minutes or less, rely on batch cooking, or use meal kits to make it as easy as possible. Let children pick from a few family favourites — it’s less about the cuisine, and more about the connection.

- **Remember: it’s not about perfection — it’s about presence.**

*By carving out time just to be with your children, you’re sending the message that they matter — and that message lasts a lifetime.
And don’t forget to have fun!*

HelloFresh offers a wide variety of family-friendly recipes with easy-to-follow steps, designed to reduce parents’ mental load and make mealtimes something to look forward to - simple, enjoyable, and wholesome in every sense.

Mimi Morley, Senior Recipe Developer at HelloFresh, added: *“After summer, the return to school and work brings its own challenges. At HelloFresh, we understand how busy family life gets. But we also believe that one great midweek dinner, without the pressure of rushing to your next task, can offer more value than a packed calendar. We’re inviting families to pause, gather, and reconnect - without the pressure of doing it all every night.”*

Subscribe to HelloFresh now to receive 50% off your first box, and for a limited time, free snacks for life! [hellofresh.co.uk](https://www.hellofresh.co.uk)

-ENDS-

***Source: OnePoll survey to 2,000 respondents in UK: Parents of children aged 4 to 18 who live at home with them.**

Notes to Editors

For further information, please contact the HelloFresh PR team at hellofresh@johndoehub.com

About HelloFresh

The HelloFresh Group is a global food solutions group and the world's leading meal kit provider. The HelloFresh Group consists of eight brands that provide customers with high quality food and recipes for different meal occasions. The Company was founded in Berlin in November 2011 and operates in the USA, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Australia, Austria, Switzerland, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, France, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Ireland and Spain. In Q1 2025 the HelloFresh Group delivered c. 240 million meals globally. HelloFresh SE went public on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange in November 2017 and is currently traded on the MDAX (Mid-Cap German Stock Market Index). The HelloFresh Group has offices in Berlin, Saarbrücken, New York, Chicago, Boulder, London, Amsterdam, Sydney, Toronto, Auckland, Paris, Copenhagen, Milan, Dublin and Barcelona.