

NATION'S CONVERSATIONS

A new report looking into what the nation is talking about at the dinner table.





FOREWORD



Families come in all shapes and sizes and family members have many differences, both big and small. That's why, over the past three years, McCain has celebrated the realities of modern families in the UK through it's We Are Family campaign.

The campaign has always looked to re-dress the lack of diversity of families shown in popular culture and will continue to do so. However, it is an evolving campaign, and we wouldn't be truly exploring the complexities of modern family life if we didn't also acknowledge the differences that occur in every household across the UK.

For our latest advert, 'Differences', we took this even further. We uncovered and celebrated the emotional impact of differences that exist within real families; differences that make family connections even stronger.

That's why we carried out this report, the Nation's Conversations, which has given us a unique fly-on-the-wall look into what the nation is talking about at the dinner table.

Clearly we are not a nation that always agrees! In fact, the significant majority agreed that we frequently share different opinions at the dinner table. However, you also agreed that these differences are positive and something to be celebrated.

From remain or leave, Love Island to the Women's Football World Cup, to deeper family issues or just life's daily grumbles, whatever the differences in opinion, the research found that when families are united at teatime, over food that everyone loves to eat, each of these differences can bring families even closer together when discussed around the dinner table.

After all, it's where we feel most like a family!

Mark Hodge
Marketing Director,
McCain Foods Limited

MODERN FAMILY MEALTIMES



In whatever form family mealtime takes, one thing is clear. Sharing a meal together is held as an integral part of family life. And this is felt across the nation, with 95% of parents agreeing that the mealtime occasion is 'important'.

"As a family it's very important to keep in regular conversation, in order to find out what's going on with one another...without that you can't really call yourself a family"

Grandad, 75, living in a multi-generational household

Shared mealtimes not only represent a practical occasion to fill up, but a crucial time for families to get together and catch up. Yet two thirds of families are missing out on daily opportunities to bond at mealtimes. Parents identified the emotional impact of this time together – recognising how it helped to foster tighter family bonds (92%), facilitated a forum to learn about each other (91%) and to better understand their children's lives (88%).

"Eating together definitely helps us to communicate better as a family and it's a good opportunity for my kids to learn new words and express themselves"

Mother of two living in a multi-generational household

But that's not to say this experience is always idyllic. Far from it. The dining occasion is also privy to disagreements, with many family members using it as an opportunity to express differences in opinion (90%) on a large variety of issues. However, over four-fifths (82%) either somewhat agree or strongly agreed that it's a good thing for families to hold different opinions and sometimes disagree on things.

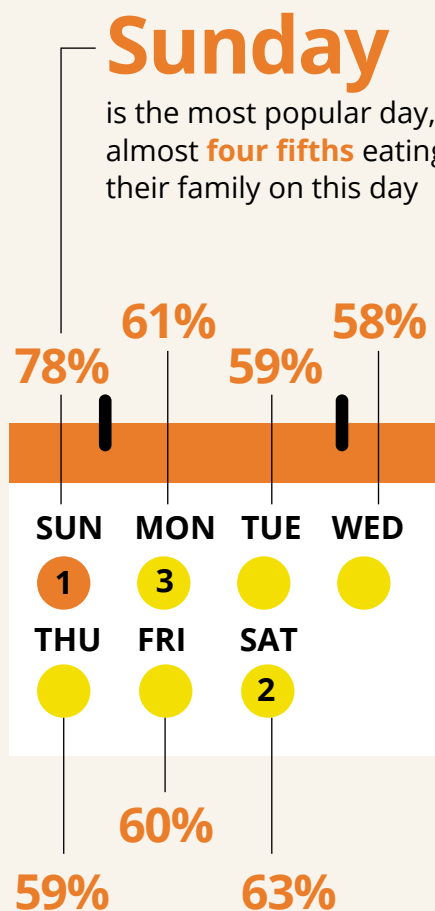
"We always encourage our kids to ask questions at the dinner table. We hope this will not only allow them to be more open with us as they grow older, but so that they'll know we'll always be on hand to answer any questions they have."

Working dad, living with partner and adopted sons

So, it's no surprise to see that the nation seems to be divided when it comes to how they experience this time together. Just under half the nation cited it as enjoyable (49%) and another fifth (20%), perhaps diplomatically, dubbing it 'lively'.



Despite our modern take on family mealtimes, some traditions hold true, as Sunday is **STILL** the most popular day to get together for a family meal.



Dads taking the lead role in preparing family meals has almost tripled but still have a long way to go in achieving kitchen parity.



64%

of respondents say the mother normally prepares the family meals in their household (down from 83% when they were younger)



13%

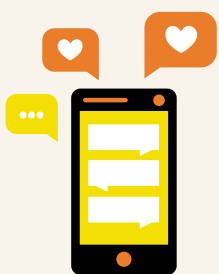
say the father normally prepares meals (up from 5% when they were younger)



15%

say it varies on a day to day basis (up from 3% when they were younger)

Accommodating pets and electronic devices at the dinner table speaks to a more relaxed attitude to table manners



41%

of families allow mobile phones and electronic devices at the table



56%

of family pets are also joining the family for dinner



43%

of families do not allow playing with food at the table



72%

of families allow each other to leave dinner table whilst others still eating

Just one third will eat as a family every night



The kitchen is the most popular dining area.

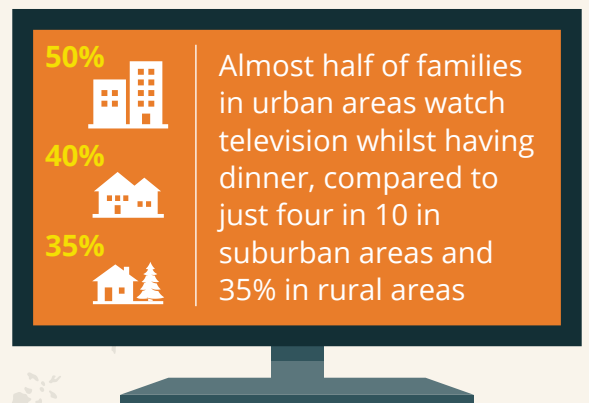
Almost half of all parents state that they 'often' eat there

40%

confess they rarely make the effort to get everyone around the table



This is followed by the living room, where over **four in 10** parents stated that they often or very often eat their dinner as a family in front of the TV



Families navigate a broad spectrum of emotional experiences at the dinner table

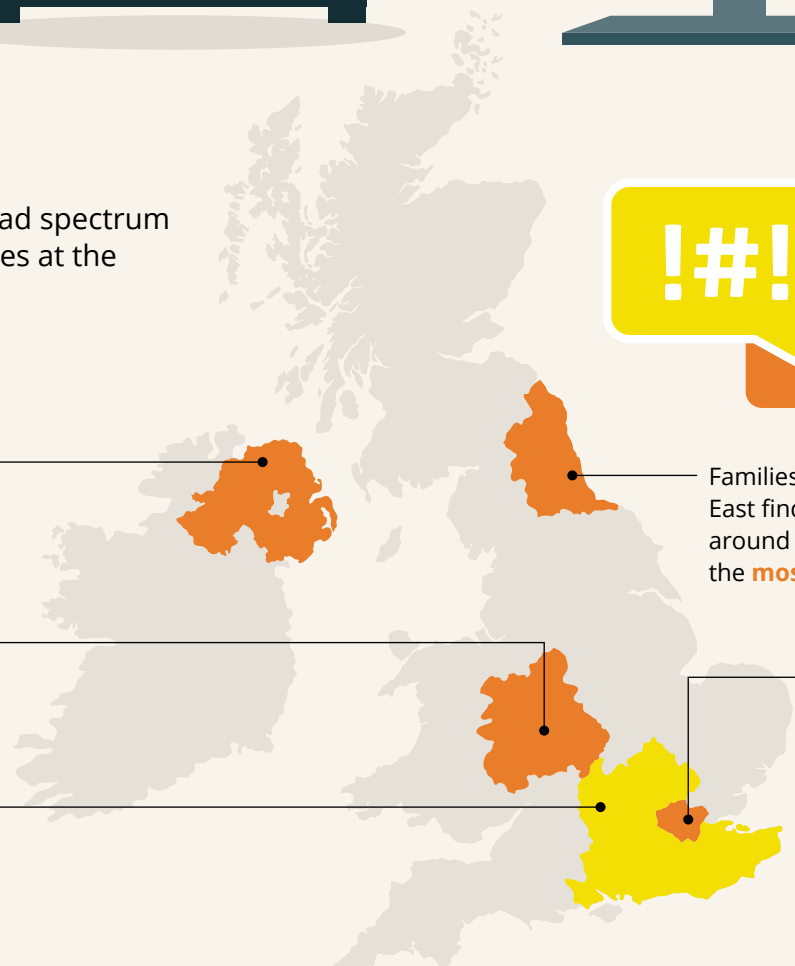
Mealtimes in Northern Ireland are the **most lively and loud**

Families in the West Midlands experience the **most chaotic dinnertime**

Families in the South East find **mealtime conversations the most challenging**

Families in the North East find conversations around the dinner table the **most enjoyable**

Families in London are the **most argumentative at dinnertime**





**SO, WHAT ARE
WE TALKING
ABOUT...**

Almost all of the parents polled (95%) stated that family members express different opinions during mealtimes, with one in 10 stating that this happens every time.

We explored the emotional impact of conversations fuelling dinnertime conversations in 2019; ranging from politics, television and money; and from the humdrum of daily family life, to new trends and social issues making their debut at mealtimes across the UK.

Overall, it's interesting to note the vital role that coming together at mealtimes has within the wider family dynamic. Whatever the topic, mealtimes should offer a safe and supportive environment for families to connect, whatever the subject and perspectives.

9 in 10

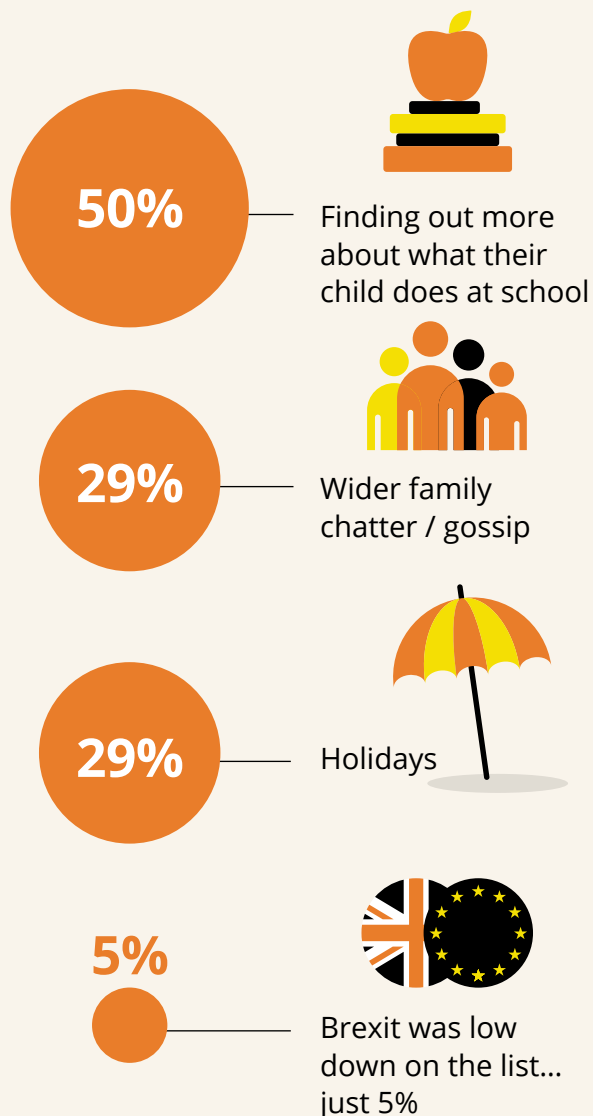
stated that family members express different opinions during mealtimes

"Our girls love to discuss topical issues amongst the family. They value the discussions and find getting a variety of opinions interesting."

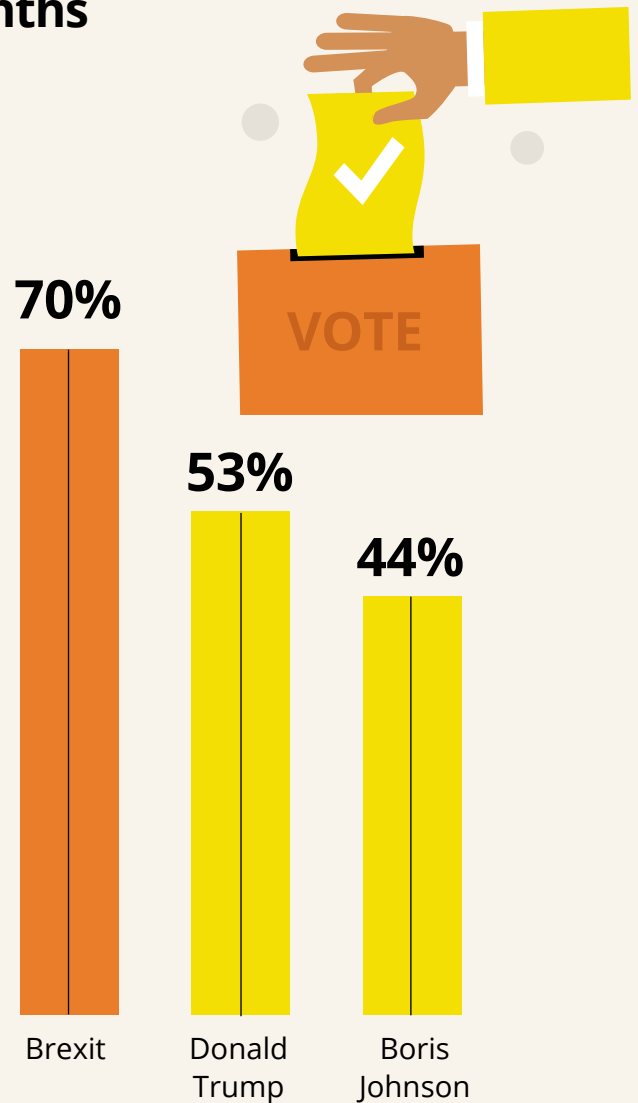
Working dad, living with wife and three daughters



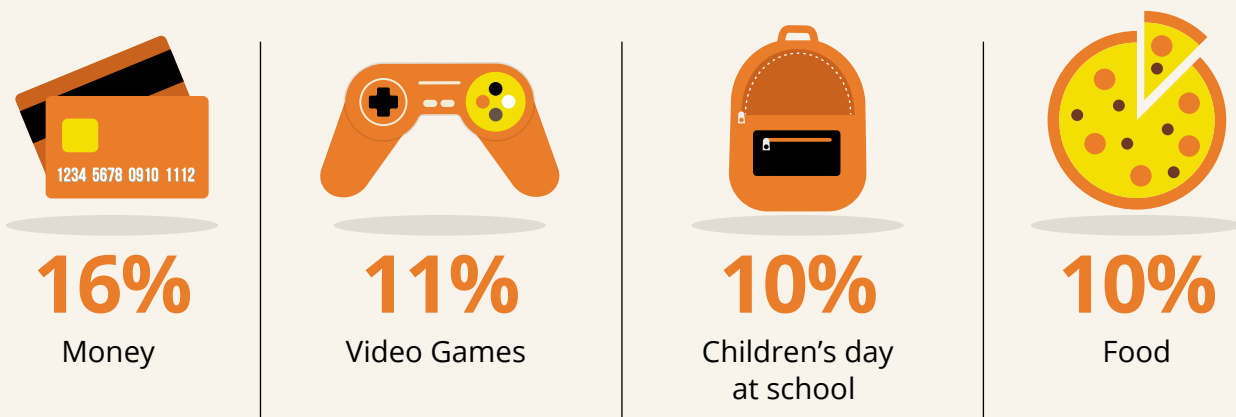
Top conversations topics around the table



Top political topics being discussed at the dinner table over the last 12 months



Top topics most likely to cause disagreements at the dinner table over the last 12 months



Parents struggle to find the right time to speak to their children about sex and sexual identity



Sex is spoken about by just

1 in 10

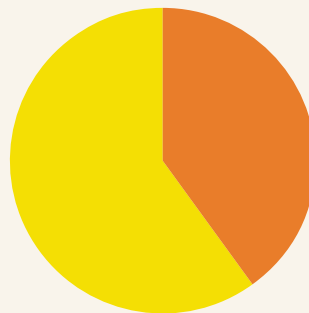
families over mealtimes, with the majority of this group (52%) stating that they don't believe it is an appropriate forum

On average, parents speak to their children about sex at the age of

10
Years old



Discussions about sexual identity are also infrequent, with just over one in 10 discussing their own or their child's sexual identity at the dinner table



4 in 10

said their child wanted to learn more about and discuss sexual identity - a third of this group said it was because their child identifies as LGBTQ+

Top 3 sporting events we've spoken about over the last twelve months

(order of popularity)



- 1** Women's Football World Cup
- 2** Start of Premiere League season
- 3** Champion League Finals

Top 5 television programmes we've spoken about over the last twelve months

(order of popularity)

- 1** Britain's Got Talent
- 2** I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here
- 3** The X Factor
- 4** Game of Thrones
- 5** Love Island



A LOT ON OUR PLATE



The research highlights two very distinct themes that traverse the family dinner table; technology, by the way of phones and tablets and the advent of increasingly popular food trends and preferences, infiltrating the dinnertime menu.

When it comes to putting food on the table, a fifth (20%) now confirm that they eat different meals to their family due to varying dietary requirements and taste. This is in line with current trends showing the phenomenal increase in people eschewing food groups from their diet – by necessity and by choice. Almost a third of families detailed catering for different food preferences.

“We love getting involved in debates because we can share our opinions and really get into the details of a topic. I am always intrigued by the differing views round the table – even though we are all from the same family.”

Mother of two living in a multi-generational household

Parents’ own experience of always eating the same meal with their family as youngsters (51%) is not being reflected in the home today. Now, just a third (31%) reported to always eating that same meal as their family.

Technology appears to be a double-edged sword for families when it comes to togetherness over mealtimes.

No longer a tech-free zone, three in 10 admitted that a family member used their mobile phone or tablet at the dinner table. Of this group, it’s probably no surprise that children are the worst offenders (44%). However, parents are culprits too, with a quarter stating that it was the adults who used mobile devices over the dinner table.

Both actions completely at odds, of course, with family rules stating, ‘no tech at the table’ (59%).

“We don’t like having phones at the dinner table because it creates a big distraction and stops us from having conversations. I want to have a conversation with my family not a screen!”

Stay at home mother living with two children

Some parents admitted that mobile devices were used as a bargaining tool, where others had a more emotive rationale for allowing them at the table, citing that it helped to virtually bring people to the table, enabling emotional connections, with those who otherwise couldn’t be there in person.

However, parents are acutely aware of the potential negative emotional impacts of both technology and social media. Four in 10 admitted that they are worried about the nature of the content their child is available to view online, whilst over two thirds (36%) said that they were worried about the impact of social media on their child’s mental health.

“There are so many positives to technology, but with online bullying seemingly rampant, I often feel scared bringing my children up in a social media era.”

Mother of two living with children and grandparents

Top reasons for allowing **mobile devices** at the dinner table

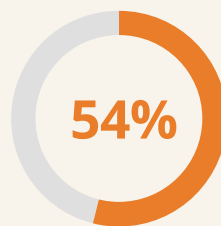
36% permit mobile phones as a 'compromise' to keep family members at the dinner table

34% use it as a 'reference point' during dinnertime discussion

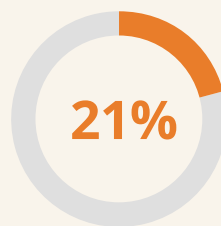
20% use it for calling wider family members over Facetime or Skype

Only
14%

think social media has a positive impact on their family

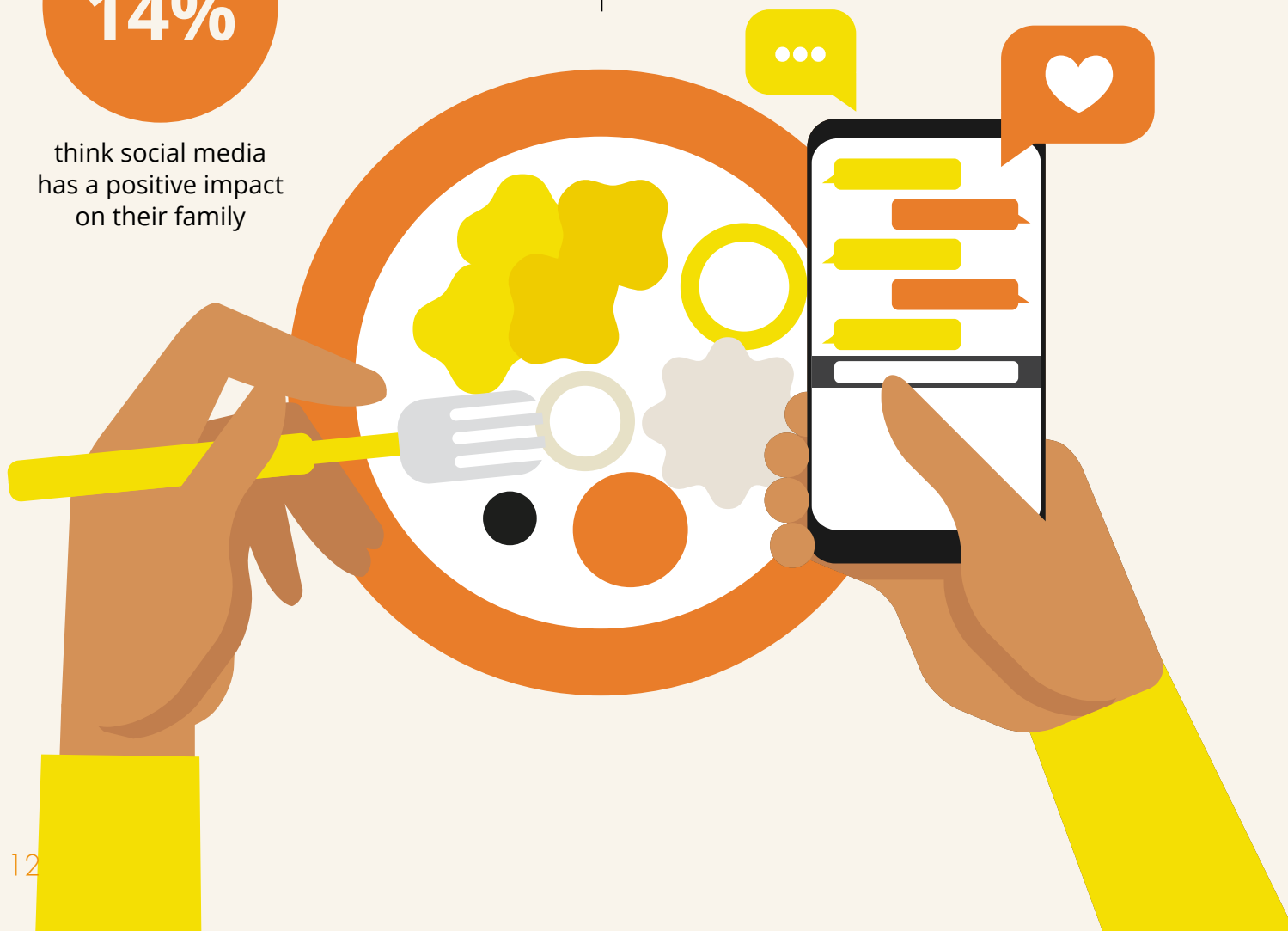


of parents agreed that the use of technology at the table 'upsets' them



of parents stated that conversations about their child's social media usage had caused disagreements at mealtimes

This was particularly marked in urban areas, where almost double the number of parents stated they had disagreements with their child about this, compared to those in suburban and rural areas.



EVER CHANGING DIALOGUE

A majority (58%) of parents readily admitted that 'the nature of conversations' they have with their families has changed from those that they had whilst eating dinner with their parents as a child. Over three quarters stating that their 'children are more engaged with current affairs and keen to discuss them'.

Perhaps reflecting a more liberal attitude society-wide, over nine in 10 (92%) of this group stated that they now talk 'more openly' with their children about a range of topics which were previously off limits to their generation.

And whilst 32% stated that they found it difficult to engage with their children in conversation, it is certainly welcome news that families today are willing and wanting to talk to their children about a whole range of topics, with few issues being truly 'off the table'.

This is a positive sign, and an indicator that the nation's conversations are likely to become ever more open and complex in the years to come.

That's why this report is just the first of many. From the more controversial topics like Brexit and bills, to the more mundane such as holidays and daily family life, we will continue to track what the nation is talking about; using it as a barometer to not only measure where differences of family opinion are most marked but to show- whatever the topic - that these differences don't divide families, but unite them.

For more information on McCain's We Are Family campaign, please visit www.mccain.com.

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