

Just for Preschoolers and their families



Talking Positively at Mealtimes

Your Words Matter

As your child's caregiver, you play the biggest role in their eating behavior. They learn from watching you. What you say has an impact on whether your child develops healthy eating habits. *Negative phrases* can easily be changed into positive, helpful ones! Try the following positive phrases.

Please SAY THIS...	Please DO NOT SAY THIS...
<p>"This is kiwi fruit; it's sweet like a strawberry." "These radishes are very crunchy!"</p> <p><i>Phrases like these help to point out the sensory qualities of food. They encourage your child to try new foods.</i></p>	<p>"Eat that for me." "If you do not eat one more bite, I will be mad."</p> <p><i>Phrases like these teach your child to eat for your approval and love. This can lead children to have unhealthy behaviors, attitudes and beliefs about food and themselves.</i></p>
<p>"Is your stomach telling you that you're full?" "Is your stomach still making its hungry growling noise?" "Has your tummy had enough?"</p> <p><i>Phrases like these help your children recognize when she is full. This can prevent overeating.</i></p>	<p>"You're such a big girl; you finished all your peas." "Jenny, look at your sister. She ate all of her bananas." "You have to take one more bite before you leave the table."</p> <p><i>Phrases like these teach your child to ignore fullness. It is better for children to stop eating when full or satisfied than when all of the food has been eaten.</i></p>
<p>"Do you like that?" "Which one is your favorite?" "Everybody likes different foods, don't they?"</p> <p><i>Phrases like these make your child feel like he is making the choices. He is learning to be independent. It also shifts the focus toward the taste of food rather than who was right.</i></p>	<p>"See, that didn't taste so bad, did it?"</p> <p><i>This implies to your child that she was wrong to refuse the food. This can lead to unhealthy attitudes about food or self.</i></p>
<p>"We can try these vegetables again another time." "Next time would you like to try them raw instead of cooked?"</p> <p><i>Reward your child with attention and kind words.</i></p>	<p>"No dessert until you eat your vegetables."</p> <p><i>Offering some foods as a reward for finishing other foods makes some foods seem more desirable than others. For example, trying to get children to eat vegetables by offering dessert usually backfires. The child thinks there is something wrong with the vegetable if he is being rewarded with dessert.</i></p>
<p>"I am sorry you are sad. Come here and let me give you a big hug."</p> <p><i>Comfort her with hugs and talks. Show love by spending time and having fun together. Patience works better than pressure.</i></p>	<p>"Stop crying and I will give you a cookie."</p> <p><i>Getting a food treat when your child is upset teaches him to eat to feel better. This can lead to overeating.</i></p>

W O R D S M A T T E R



REFERENCES

Adapted from the University of Idaho



University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension

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