



Talking Positively at Mealtimes

Your words matter



EXTENSION
College of Agriculture,
Biotechnology & Natural Resources



FS-21-90

By Buffington Calvillo, Aurora and Lindsay, Anne

Adults play the biggest role in a child's eating behavior. They learn from watching. What an adult says has an impact on whether or not a child develops healthy eating habits. Negative phrases can easily be changed into positive, helpful ones! Try the following positive phrases.

Please Say THIS...	Please <u>DO NOT</u> Say THIS...
<p>"This is kiwi fruit; it's sweet like a strawberry." "These radishes are very crunchy!"</p> <p><i>Phrases such as these help point out the sensory qualities of food. They encourage children 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 such as these incorrectly teach children to eat for someone's 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 such as these help children know when they are full. This can prevent overeating.</i></p>	<p>"You're such a big girl; you finished all your peas." "Look at Jenny! She ate all of her bananas." "You have to take one more bite before you leave the table."</p> <p><i>Phrases such as these teach children to ignore fullness cues. It is better for children to stop eating when full or satisfied than when all of the food has been eaten.</i></p>



Please Say THIS...	Please <u>DO NOT</u> Say THIS...
<p>“Do you like that?” “Which one is your favorite?” “Everybody likes different foods, don’t they?”</p> <p><i>Phrases such as these allow children to feel like they are making the choices. They are 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 children that they were 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 children with attention and kind words.</i></p>	<p>“No dessert until you eat your vegetables.”</p> <p><i>Offering certain foods as a reward for finishing other foods makes those foods seem more desirable than others. For example, trying to get children to eat vegetables by offering dessert usually backfires. Children think there is something wrong with the vegetable if they are 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 them 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>Giving a food treat when your children are upset teaches them to eat to feel better. This can lead to overeating.</i></p>



REFERENCES

Adapted from the University of Idaho.



EXTENSION
 College of Agriculture,
 Biotechnology & Natural Resources



An EEO/AA Institution. Extension is a unit of the University of Nevada, Reno's College of Agriculture, Biotechnology & Natural Resources engaged in Nevada communities, presenting research-based knowledge to address critical community needs. It is a county-state-federal partnership providing practical education to people, businesses, and communities. For more information on its programs, visit extension.unr.edu.

This material was created for the Healthy Kids Resource Center, extension.unr.edu/healthykids, and funded in part by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Extension is an EEO/AA Institution.