



# TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD Have a Positive Relationship with Food & their Body

Children are exposed to many messages about food, health, and bodies through media, family, friends and school. Our personal experiences impact how we talk about food and bodies with our children. Below you will find tips to help your child develop a positive relationship with food and their body.



## 1. KNOW YOUR FEEDING ROLE

- You decide: where to eat, when to eat & what to offer.
- Trust your child to decide: which foods to eat from the foods you offer & how much to eat.
- Offer a variety of foods at mealtimes. Offer at least one food that you know your child will eat.
- Focus on enjoying the meal and conversation together rather than focusing on what your child is eating.

## 2. REMOVE PRESSURE FROM FOOD

- Eating a variety of foods is a skill that takes time to develop.
- Your child will eat best if mealtimes are relaxed. Instead of telling children to eat “one more bite” or to finish their plate, let them decide when they are done eating.
- Avoid using food as a reward or punishment. Dessert does not need to be earned.

## 3. PRACTICE FOOD NEUTRALITY

- There are no good or bad foods. Food provides more than nutrition.
- Avoid labelling foods as “healthy” and “unhealthy”, or “treats” and “junk food”; this can lead to black and white thinking about food. Instead of assigning labels or grouping foods by healthfulness, call food by its name. For example, broccoli, candy, hamburgers, and cookies.
- Having a positive relationship with food means being comfortable eating a variety of foods that support both nutrition and enjoyment.

“ Raising a healthy eater takes years. Children learn bite by bite, food by food, meal by meal. The goal of raising a healthy eater is to help your child grow up with positive eating attitudes and behaviors; it is not to get them to eat their peas for tonight’s supper. – Ellyn Satter, MS, MSSW, RDN ”

## 4. EAT TOGETHER

- Eating meals with others is a great way to connect, spend time together, and share about your day. It also allows us to share our culture and tradition through food.
- Eating together as a household can help protect adolescents from disordered eating and eating disorders.

## 5. HAVE FUN WITH FOOD

- Get your kids involved in cooking; it doesn't have to be complicated (i.e., build your own taco or pizza night, salad bowls, etc.).
- Read books about food. We love *Bilal Cooks Dahl*, *What's Cooking at 10 Garden St.*, and *Dragons Love Tacos*. Check out [this list](#) for more ideas.
- Take time to explore food using the senses. What does it look, feel, smell, taste and sound like?

## 6. BE A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

- Keep diet culture out of the home. Notice how you talk about your body, weight, and food.
- Let your child hear you saying one positive thing about your body daily (i.e., I am so thankful for my strong arms that let me give you big hugs).
- Show your child that you eat and enjoy a variety of foods. Don't restrict your food or diet in front of your kids; they will notice.

## 7. RESPECT ALL KINDS OF BODIES

- Talk about how bodies come in all shapes and sizes; short, tall, fat, thin. All bodies are good bodies and deserve respect. A person's health and worth is not determined by their size.
- Explore books that talk about body diversity. For example, *Bodies are Cool* by Tyler Feder, *The Body Book* by Roz MacLean, *I Love All of Me* by Lorie Ann Grover.

## 8. TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO BE CRITICAL OF MEDIA

- Talk about how media, including social media, can impact our body image.
- Talk about how pictures do not always depict reality and how this can make us feel about our bodies.
- Help your children set boundaries with social media.

## 9. RETHINK COMPLIMENTS

- Body talk, which is any conversation about another person's appearance, can be harmful, even if it is intended as a positive compliment.
- Focus compliments to your child or others on their unique qualities and talents instead of appearance. An increased focus on appearance can devalue other qualities that make us interesting.

## 10. MOVE FOR FUN

- Find movement that is joyful and fun. Explore a variety of activities to find ones that you and your child enjoy.
- Focus on how movement can help build self-confidence, help us to sleep well, and manage stress.
- Avoid talking about physical activity as punishment for eating (i.e., I ate a big piece of cake now I must go for a run).

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