

Mealtime Conversations

DO'S AND DON'TS

for Preschoolers

During mealtimes, it is important to make positive comments that help children and don't hinder them when developing eating habits. Here are some examples of what to say and not say during mealtimes.

"This is kiwi fruit; it's sweet like a strawberry."

"These radishes are very crunchy!"

Phrases like these help to point out the characteristics of food. They may encourage children to try new foods.

"Do you like that food?"

"What is your favorite food?"

"Everybody likes different foods, don't they?"

Phrases like these make children feel like they are in control of their eating habits and shifts the focus toward the taste of food.

"Is your stomach telling you that you're full?"

"Is your stomach making a hungry, growling noise?"

"Has your tummy had enough?"

Phrases like these help children to recognize their hunger cues when they are full. This can prevent overeating.

"It's okay that you didn't want to try this food."

"If you like, we can try this food another time."

Phrases like these promote decision-making skills. They also focus on children's food preferences instead of the amount or types of foods consumed.

"Eat that for me."

"If you do not eat one more bite, I will be mad."

Phrases like these teach children to eat for your approval. This can lead children to have unhealthy behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs about food and themselves.

"Jenny, look at your sister. She ate all of her bananas."

"You have to take one more bite before you can leave the table."

Phrases like these teach children to ignore fullness. It is better for children to stop eating when full or satisfied than when all of the food has been eaten.

"See, that didn't taste so bad, did it?"

Phrases like this imply that the children were wrong to refuse the food. This can lead to unhealthy attitudes about food or themselves.

"No dessert until you eat your vegetables."

"Stop crying, and I will give you a cookie."

Phrases like these imply that some foods are better than others. Using food as a reward promotes emotional eating because the food is used to cope with their feelings.