

NUTRITION TIDBITS FOR TEACHERS

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Sometimes teachers say things to get the children to eat more. We worry that children will not get enough to eat and that they will be hungry. We also worry if they are not eating enough protein or vegetables. However, when we praise children for ‘cleaning’ their plate, it can teach them to eat too much. Eating too much can cause a child to gain too much weight. Do your part to prevent childhood obesity by watching what you say at mealtime.

4 things to AVOID saying at mealtime

1) “Eat that for me”

- Why it’s bad: A child may worry that you will withhold love unless they eat more.
- What to say instead: While eating the food they are skeptical of, you can make neutral positive comments like, “mmm, this strawberry is sweet” or “oh, this radish is nice and crunchy.” Let a child decide on their own whether to eat or not.

2) “You are such a big girl, you finished all your peas”

- Why it’s bad: This teaches a child to be proud of themselves for finishing their plate. It shames a child who doesn’t eat as much as others. **It’s better to support a child in eating when they are hungry and stopping when they are full.**
- What to say instead: Is your tummy full? Have you had enough?

3) “You cannot leave the table until you have one more bite”

- Why it’s bad: Avoid phrases that punish a child when they don’t eat a lot. Sometimes a child just isn’t hungry, and it’s important to stop eating when you are not hungry.
- What to say instead: Is your tummy full? Have you had enough? We won’t be eating again until after nap, so if you get hungry, you will have to wait until after nap time.

4) “No peaches until you finish your chicken”

- Why it’s bad: Kids are good at eating what they need for growth. You don’t need to try to get them to eat a balanced diet at every meal. Research shows that preschoolers even out their eating over the week.
- What to say instead: Nothing. Sit down and eat with the kids. Make neutral comments about what you are eating. Like “Isn’t this strawberry crunchy?” Let the kids eat or not eat. Enjoy their company.

References

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