



Talking to Kids About Food

Kids need time and practice to become good eaters. Use supportive words to help kids explore food and to make learning feel more comfortable.

Language to try

- ✓ How does this taste—sweet or sour? How does it sound?
- ✓ Yes, these peas are crunchy!
- ✓ This is asparagus. It tastes a bit like broccoli.
- ✓ I made the broccoli with lemon juice and a little butter. See what you think.
- ✓ If you try it and don't want to swallow, ask me for a tissue so you can politely spit into it.
- ✓ I put mushrooms in the sauce. If you don't want to eat them, you can pick them out.
- ✓ Would you like more?
- ✓ Is your tummy telling you that you are full?

Language that helps kids:

- provides information about the food
- makes learning feel safe
- helps kids make decisions
- supports pleasant family meals

Language to avoid

- ✗ How do you know you don't like them if you haven't even tried them?
- ✗ Try it - you'll like it.
- ✗ Take at least one bite for me.
- ✗ You have to take one more bite before you can leave the table.
- ✗ If you eat that, we can go to the park.
- ✗ If you finish your peas, you can have cake.
- ✗ I wish you were a good eater like Michael.
- ✗ Look at Jenny. She ate all her fish.
- ✗ Good boy! You finished all your berries.
- ✗ See, that didn't taste so bad, did it?
- ✗ You never like anything.

Language to avoid:

- can feel pushy
- might involve bribes
- could make kids feel badly
- might suggest that kids have to eat a certain way to earn your approval

Helpful Food

I hate this food. I don't want it.

You don't need to eat it if you don't want it. Just say "no, thank you." It's not okay to make a fuss about the food I have cooked. There is bread on the table and *[list other foods]*. You can choose from what is here.

I don't want them either. I want Kraft™ dinner.

We haven't had Kraft™ dinner for a long time. That sounds like a good idea for lunch some other time this week. What's here is what I made for lunch today.

Half an hour after supper:

I'm hungry! Can I have a sandwich?

No. We just finished supper, and snack time isn't for another hour.

But I'm HUNGRY!

I know you're hungry. Snack time will be in an hour. In the meantime, you can help me with the dishes (or play with your trucks, or...)

Next day at supper, when child asks to leave the table:

Remember yesterday how hard it was to wait until snack time? Are you sure you have had enough to eat?



Adults decide **what foods** to offer, and **when** and **where** to serve meals and snacks.

Conversations



Kids decide **how much** to eat, and **which** foods to choose from what is provided.

Yuck. I thought we were having REAL French fries. These look gross.

These potato fries are different looking, aren't they? I made them fresh from real potatoes, and baked them in the oven. See what you think.

Hmmpff. *(crosses arms, won't eat)*

To other child at table:

Jake, what did you do at the park today?

Right away, take focus away from the food and the complaining child so that they are not rewarded with attention. Child will likely join the conversation, relax and start to eat.

Snack time is soon. We have carrots with yogurt dip, or cheese and crackers.

I don't want a snack.

Okay, but we're not having supper for another 2½ hours. That's a long time, so I'm going to have a snack. Come and sit with me while I eat.

Put plate in center of table so child can share if they want.

Snack time is soon. Would you like fish and crackers, or yogurt with berries?

I want crackers and peanut butter!!

That sounds good for tomorrow's snack. but today the choices are fish and crackers, or yogurt with berries.

To speak with a Registered Dietitian at HealthLinkBC, call 811 (or 604-215-8110).



10-421-6053 (IND Rev. 08/18)

Adapted, with permission, from "The Feeding Relationship," Interior Health, 2005

Developed by Population Health Registered Dietitians.