



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Mealtime Conversations with Preschoolers

Positive and effective communication is the foundation for developing healthy and mutually rewarding child-to-child relationships and adult-to-child relationships. When you pay attention to children and encourage communication, you help them to create a positive view of themselves and the world in which they live. Mealtimes are no exception to great conversations; when young children participate in positive and effective mealtime conversations, they can learn about food, develop social skills, and learn how to recognize their hunger cues. Here is a closer look at how preschoolers communicate, as well as some benefits and strategies for engaging with them in mealtime conversations.



Preschoolers and Communication

Preschoolers begin to talk in sentences that are grammatically correct even though the sequence may be incorrect. They like to talk about past experiences and may pretend to have imaginary friends or experiences. Preschoolers often talk to themselves when playing and working on tasks.

Benefits of Mealtime Conversations

Talking about food's characteristics at mealtimes, like taste, feel, and smell, can create appeal, increase excitement, and magnify curiosity about food amongst young children. For example, questions such as "What happens to little tomatoes when you bite them?" or "How does the baked chicken smell?" can help children use their senses to explore food. Additionally, mealtime conversations promote social skills among young children. More specifically, pleasant conversations at the table help to expand vocabulary, encourage active listening, and assist young children in feeling more comfortable in their environment.

On the contrary, mealtime conversations can be harmful if children feel the need to eat to gain your approval. For example, encouraging a child to eat a new food by saying, "I will be very happy if you eat the pineapple," can



lead some children to eat to gain your approval. These statements can lead to unhealthy thoughts about food and self-image/esteem. Therefore, use phrases that help children:

- point out the sensory qualities of food. For example, “This is kiwi fruit; it’s sweet like a strawberry.” This phrase could indirectly encourage children to try new foods.
- recognize when they are full. For example, “Has your tummy had enough?” This phrase can help prevent young children from overeating because it encourages them to listen to their body.
- feel like they are making the choices. For example, “Which one is your favorite?” This phrase also shifts the focus toward the taste of food rather than who was right.

In conclusion, there are numerous benefits to engaging in mealtime conversations. Above all, when you make conversations interactive and positive, mealtimes can be a place where healthy eating habits are formed and skills are developed.

References

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