



15 Tips to Help Children Develop Healthier Attitudes about Food

- 1) Teach children that **food is fuel**. Foods are neither good nor bad.
- 2) **Model eating foods from all the food groups and select food that is natural** and organic, minimally processed and food that has ingredients that you would cook with.
- 3) **Be mindful of how often you use food as a reward**. For example, getting ice cream for a great meet is normal and fun. Use it sparingly. While food is celebratory and inherently social, it can be dangerous to be used as the only reward. This sets up the association that when I do “good”, I get food and vice versa.
- 4) **Ditch tech during meals**. Eating meals and sharing food experience should be a time for connection. Turn off and stow away the devices.
- 5) **Avoid using food as a method to self-soothe or numb one’s self**. Instead, model positive coping behaviors rather than using food to cope with negative emotions.
- 6) **Teach children to eat the rainbow of natural foods**. A wonderful interactive video at our museum teaches kids that they need to eat certain foods from these categories, if their hiker is going to be able to summit the mountain. It is important to make balanced choices that properly run our bodies.
- 7) **Teach them where their food comes from**. Get children involved in growing food and selecting food from the grocery store and farmer’s markets.
- 8) **Involve children in meal planning and preparation**. This gives them ownership and “buy-in” to meals and food choices.
- 9) **Lose the language called “cheat day”**. Sweets are fine, just in moderation. I know that this is easier said than done, as I have a serious sweet tooth.
- 10) **Eat mindfully**. Focus on all senses when eating food and teach your children to do the same. You can do this with any kind of food.
- 11) **Avoid food struggles and battles**. Parents and caregivers provide the what and the when and children decide on if and how much.
- 12) The best advice I ever got was in my Developmental Psychology class. **Kids will get what they need over time** if we provide a wide range of healthy choices.
- 13) **Teach children how to identify hunger and fullness**. Eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full.
- 14) **Avoid commenting on how much someone ate or what they ate**. Food shaming fuels negative attitudes and behaviors about food and then this plays out in how people treat their bodies.
- 15) **Allow sweets in moderation**. Making them “too special” creates an “all-or-nothing” mindset about food and makes people feel “deprived.”

For more information on food attitudes, please contact me at drkerryluke@gmail.com or visit bodyappreciationandself-kindness.com.