

Casual Conversations about Healthy Food



Teachable Moments at Mealtimes

How talking about food at the table can influence children's eating!

When you are sitting down and sharing meals and snacks with children, what do you talk about? Keep an eye out—you may find some teachable moments with children about the food. Mealtimes lend themselves well to informal lessons. Talk with children about where foods come from and how they keep our bodies healthy. Read here for some ideas for informal lessons about nutrition.

Colors on the Plate

Children eat more of the food on their plates when the foods are more colorful. They like to see up to six colors on their plates! Talk about colors as a way to get children familiar with their foods.

- What colors do you see on your plate?
- Can you find a yellow food? What about a red food?
- How many different colors can you count on your plate?

Flavors

Comparing a new food to another known, well-liked food can help children know what to expect. This may help any fear they have about trying it.

- This sweet potato feels like a white potato in my mouth, but it's sweeter.
- Have you tried kiwi? It's sweet like a strawberry and tart like a lime.

Tip: Even if children are not willing to try the food, the **conversation** will **help** them recognize it next time.

Smells

Our sense of smell informs the flavor of foods. Getting a sniff of a new food can be a safe way for a child to learn more about it. This is a good thing! If the child chooses to taste the food, great. If not, don't despair! Know that they are getting familiar with the food and just might try it next time.

- Do you smell the lemon juice on this fish?
- Mmm, that tomato and meat sauce on our [whole- grain] noodles smells tasty!

Smells

These carrots are raw. Do they smell different than the cooked carrots we had before?





Plant Parts

We eat so many different plant parts, from root to leaf. Talk with children about what part of the plant they are eating.

- Did you know carrots grow under the ground? They are roots!
- This celery is long and thin. What plant part do you think it is? (Stem)
- This lettuce is flat. What plant part is flat? (Leaves)

Growing and Producing Food

Teaching children about how food is grown or produced helps them see its value. They can learn that food does not just come from the grocery store—a farmer grew it!

- Did you know plants start out as tiny seeds?
- This milk came from a cow.
- How was this bread made? First a farmer grew and harvested it, then it was ground into flour. That flour was mixed with a few other ingredients like yeast to make bread.
- Do you know what fruits and vegetables grow in our area?

Growing Food

This sweet potato was planted in the spring, and harvested in the fall.



Nutrition in Food

Let children know that fruits and vegetables give us lots of vitamins. These vitamins help keep our bodies healthy and feeling well.

- Carrots give your eyes vitamin A to help you see.
- Oranges help keep us from getting sick because they have vitamin C.
- This is whole-wheat bread. We call it whole wheat because it was made using all the parts of the wheat grain. Eating the whole wheat grain gives us more vitamins than only eating the white part!

Textures

The texture of food is a common barrier for children accepting it. Do you remember what meat, bananas, or tomatoes first felt like in your mouth? Children can take time to adjust to new textures. Help children by describing them.

- Do you know what happens when you bite into this cherry tomato? It goes, ‘gush!’ In my mouth.
- This soup has some firm pieces like the chicken and some squishy noodles.
- What sound does it make when we bite these carrots? They go "CRUNCH!" like apple slices!

Table Manners

“Don’t yuck my yum” is a useful phrase to teach children to talk about food politely and let their peers enjoy the meal.



Table Manners

You can help make sure that all children have the chance to enjoy their food when everyone uses good table manners.

- “I don’t like it...yet” leaves the door open for a child to accept the food somewhere down the road.