

Positive Language at Mealtimes

As caregiver, you play the biggest role in your child's eating behaviour.
 What you SAY has an impact on developing healthy eating habits.
 Negative phrases can easily be changed into positive, helpful ones!



<p>Instead of...</p> <p><i>Eat that for me.</i> <i>If you do not eat one more bite I will be mad.</i> Phrases like these teach your child to eat for your approval and love. This can lead your child to have unhealthy behaviours, attitudes and beliefs about food and about themselves.</p>	<p>Try...</p> <p><i>You have 5 superpowers to learn about food – eyes, ears, nose, hands/body, mouth & tongue. Which ones will you use today?</i> <i>This is kiwifruit. It's sweet like a strawberry. This celery is very crunchy!</i> <i>Grapefruit has a sour taste. What else tastes sour?</i> Phrases like these help to point out the sensory qualities of food. They encourage your child to try new foods at their own pace.</p>
<p>Instead of...</p> <p><i>You're such a big girl; you finished all your peas.</i> <i>Jenny, look at your sister. She ate all of her banana.</i> <i>You have to take one more bite before you leave the table.</i> Phrases like these teach your child to ignore fullness. It is better for children to stop eating when they feel satisfied rather than when all of the food has been eaten. It's OK if children don't get this right every time. The learning is key.</p>	<p>Try...</p> <p><i>What does your tummy say? Is your tummy still hungry or is it full?</i> <i>Is your stomach still making its hungry growling noise?</i> <i>We listen to our tummy and stop when it's happy or full</i> Phrases like these help your child to recognise when he or she is still hungry or full. This can prevent overeating.</p>
<p>Instead of...</p> <p><i>See, that didn't taste so bad, did it?</i> <i>Don't spit that out!</i> This implies to your child that he was wrong to refuse or remove food from his mouth. This can lead to unhealthy attitudes about food or self. Spitting out food is an important part of learning to like new foods.</p>	<p>Try...</p> <p><i>What did that taste like? Which one is your favourite?</i> <i>Everybody likes different foods, don't they?</i> <i>You can spit the food out into this napkin.</i> <i>It's OK that you didn't like the broccoli. Our tastebuds are always changing their minds. Next time you might like it.</i> Phrases like these make your child feel like he or she is making the right choices. It also shifts the focus towards the taste of the food rather than who was right.</p>
<p>Instead of...</p> <p><i>No dessert until you eat your vegetables.</i> <i>Stop crying and I will give you a biscuit.</i> Offering some foods, like dessert, in reward for finishing others, like vegetables, makes some foods seem better than others. Getting a food treat when upset teaches your child to eat to feel better. This can lead to overeating.</p>	<p>Try...</p> <p><i>We can try these vegetables again another time. Next time would you like to try them raw instead of cooked?</i> <i>I am sorry you are sad. Come here and let me give you a big hug.</i> Never serve dessert as reward for eating other foods. Comfort your child with hugs, kind words and talks. Never food.</p>

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<p>Instead of... <i>Cut up your meat like a big boy please.</i></p> <p>This is a directive, not a supportive phrase.</p>	<p>Try... <i>I can... you can....</i> <i>e.g. I can cut my meat into strips like this. You can try it too if you want.</i> <i>I can open my snow pea to see what's inside. You can peel yours open too.</i> Phrases like these encourage your child to copy a food skill you are demonstrating. You're not forcing your child to copy you, but supporting them to do it if they wish.</p>
<p>Instead of... <i>I don't like... or</i> <i>You don't like...</i></p> <p>Phrases like these are negative and don't encourage exploration and learning. It implies that a decision has been made about a particular food and there is no possibility of change.</p>	<p>Try... <i>You are still learning to like _____.</i> <i>_____ is a food that I am still learning to like.</i></p> <p>This phrase tells your child that it's OK to take time to learn about food and that you are supporting them in that learning. It also lets them know you think they can do it! You don't know how long it might take your child to learn to like any given food (remember it could be years and many, many exposures to that food), so it pays to keep positive and open to everything.</p>
<p>Instead of... <i>You always ask for banana! Why don't you try another fruit? You're so picky!</i></p> <p>This phrase shows your frustration with the selective eating, not support.</p>	<p>Try... <i>We don't eat the same foods every day. That's boring! You had banana yesterday, let's find something different to eat today.</i></p> <p>Phrases like this help to teach your child about the importance of variety, stop them from going on a food jag or getting food burnout from eating the same foods day in and day out. They help you remain in control of what food is on offer.</p>
<p>Instead of... <i>Go on. Smell the strawberry. It's not going to bite you!</i></p> <p>This phrase also shows your frustration, and doesn't acknowledge the fact that even smelling a food may be a really big step for your child.</p>	<p>Try... <i>If you're ready you can....</i> <i>e.g. If you're ready you can smell the strawberry if you want to.</i></p> <p>This phrase reminds your child that you are supporting them to learn to like new foods at their own pace.</p>