

Messages to Send to Children

Some ways of interacting with children during mealtimes are better than others, especially when discussing food and eating habits. This sheet addresses certain comments that we should avoid, because they set children on the wrong path. It also gives a range of tips for making mealtimes enjoyable for children and encouraging them to listen to their hunger, discover new foods and develop their taste. You will learn when to use them with different children so that each child feels valued. Your interactions with children will be more constructive, and lunch will be more enjoyable for everyone!

Pleasure



Avoid

- ▶ You are eating the same lunch again?!
- ▶ You only eat pasta. You are just picky.
- ▶ Hurry up, everyone has finished except you.
- ▶ I have a job for the first person who finishes eating.
- ▶ No talking during lunch.



Say

- ▶ What did you like the most in your lunch and why?
- ▶ Take the time to enjoy each bite.
- ▶ Help your parents make your lunch. It's something to be proud of!
- ▶ Your lunch looks so yummy with all those colours!
- ▶ Use your inside voice.
- ▶ If you are hungry, now is the time to focus on your lunch, because then we are going outside to play.
- ▶ It is so nice that we are all eating together.
- ▶ Do you want to tell your table mates about your lunch? That looks like an interesting dish to try.



Foods and taste

Avoid

- ▶ That's not very healthy, what you have there.
- ▶ Bread and pasta make you fat.
- ▶ Eat your broccoli to get strong (see the sheet "Children's Needs").
- ▶ Eat your apple. It's good for you.
- ▶ Eat at least your vegetables.



Say

- ▶ It feels so good to drink when you're thirsty!
- ▶ Your food looks good! Who made that?
- ▶ Do you cook too? Wow, way to go!
- ▶ Yum, what a great idea! What do you call that?
- ▶ Your vegetables look delicious!
- ▶ There are no good or bad foods. There are only foods that we eat often and others we eat less often.

Hunger



Avoid

- ▶ Eat at least half of your lunch.
- ▶ There is still a lot of food left in your lunch. Eat 2 - 3 more bites.
- ▶ Don't tell me you are hungry for dessert if you aren't hungry for the rest of your lunch.
- ▶ Don't eat too much, or you'll get fat.
- ▶ Don't drink while you eat, it will ruin your appetite.
- ▶ Try a little harder. Your parents paid for that meal.

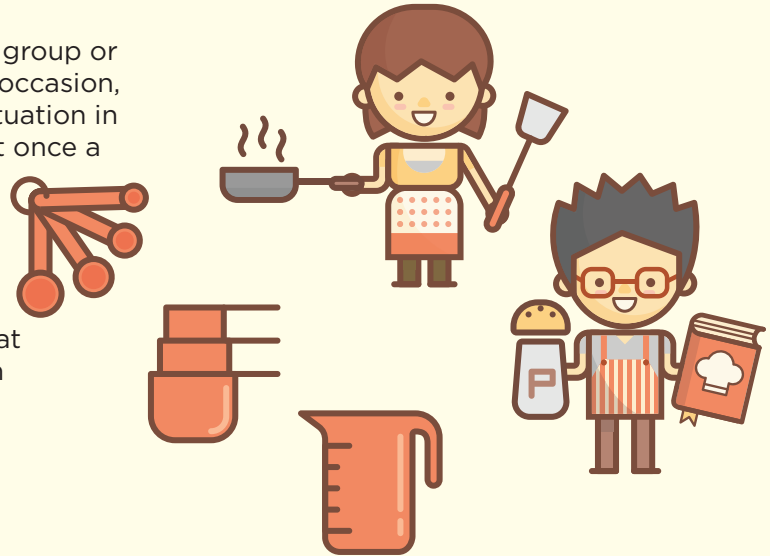


Say

- ▶ Are you a little hungry or very hungry today?
- ▶ Listen to your hunger. You decide how much you eat.
- ▶ Slow down and taste your food. It's not a race.
- ▶ It's OK to leave a little room for your dessert. No need to force yourself to finish.

Home cooking week

This is a great activity to do with your group or all the children in school daycare on occasion, if suitable for the socio-economic situation in your area. You could eventually try it once a month. Why not? For example, you could have children present and explain a recipe they have prepared, hold a recipe exchange, find several recipes that everyone can make and eat together on the same day, take photos of dishes that children cooked at home, or come up with your own ideas.



Two birds, one stone

Use mealtimes or the time after classes to do the following:

- ▶ Talk about where foods come from and how they grow or are produced. Carrots don't grow in the refrigerator!
- ▶ Organize little activities, like regrowing a lettuce heart or planting beans, to help children understand that food doesn't just magically appear. It also helps them to value food.
- ▶ Help children value food by explaining that many people worked very hard to bring that food to their plates.
- ▶ Teach them that certain foods are produced close by and that others come from far away by boat or by plane.
- ▶ Bring in your own containers (so as not to target a particular child) to show them that some foods have more packaging than necessary, and to promote reusable containers (less waste).
- ▶ Remind children that by helping their parents prepare their lunches, they can help make sure they get the right amount of food. That also helps cut down on waste.

