

Mealtime Comments to Encourage Preschoolers' Healthy Eating

Refer to hunger and fullness while talking to children during meals to help them recognize their internal cues.		Gently encourage children to try new foods without pressuring them. Given children repeated exposure to new foods. Model healthy eating by trying each food yourself.	
Use this	Instead of this	Use this	Instead of this
"Are you full?"	"Are you done?"	"You can touch and smell the section of orange first to see if you might like to try it. You don't have to eat it. You can try it next time."	"Can you put a little tiny bit on your plate? Just try it, please."
"If your tummy is full, you can put your plate back on the cart; wash your hands, and then play." "You should eat until your tummy feels full, and then you can play."	"When you play with your cup, you're showing me you're done."	Try some of the food yourself and comment on its taste. "Yummy! The yogurt and berries taste sweet. Would you like to try some?"	"Even if you do not want to eat it, you need to take a no-thank-you bite."
"If you are still hungry, you can still have some more."	"Do you want some more?"	Give children choices. Ask them to choose between two healthy choices they have not tried yet. "Would you like to have carrots and dip, or cheese and apple slices?"	"You have not touched the salad; you need to try some."
"Does it make your tummy happy?"	"Let's see you make a happy (clean) plate."	Avoid praising children for finishing food on their plates.	
"Does your body have what it needs?"	"Hurry up. It's time to go. Lunchtime is over."	"You ate all of your vegetables; you must have been hungry. If you are still hungry, you can have more."	"Sarah ate all her vegetables. Good girl." "That's great! You cleaned your plate. Mommy will be happy today."
"When we run out of bread, if you're still hungry, you can try some green beans and fruit."	"Eat your green beans and fruit now. You had enough bread already."	Educate children about nutrition outside of mealtime to avoid pressuring children to eat.	
"Start with one scoop, and if you are hungry later, you can have more."	"Don't take two scoops. Take one scoop. Okay?"	Find free resources for nutrition education activities – such as games, books, posters, and brochures – on these and other websites: www.fns.usda.gov/tn/child-care-providers , www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resource-library .	"Drink your milk; it will make you strong." "Vegetables are good for you."
"It is okay to not eat if you are full. But you should eat now if you are hungry."	"You did not eat anything, and you will be hungry later. Eat something now."	Avoid restricting foods.	
"If you are full, you don't need to keep eating now. We have a lot of food in the kitchen for everyone. We will also have snacks soon. So if you're hungry later, you can eat during snack time."	"You ate a lot. Your tummy will hurt if you eat more."	Keep offering a variety of foods. Model by eating new food yourself so children become more familiar with them.	"You need to eat your veggies before I give you some fruit."
Even if there is food on your plate, gently push the plate away and tell children, "I am full, and my tummy is happy. I don't want to eat more."	"I don't like this food."	Remind children that if there is a particular food they really like, you will always have it again.	"You won't get more cracker if you don't eat your veggies."
"We should eat when we are hungry, and we can stop eating when our tummy is full. It is okay to stop eating if you are full, even if there is food left on your plate."	"We cannot waste food by leaving any on our plates. Let's make a happy (clean) plate."		