

Making Mealtimes More Pleasant



Don't run a restaurant.

Make one meal, but offer options as to how to have it served. [Do you want your hamburger on a bun, or on your plate?] When most of us were kids we ate what was put in front of us. There was never any ambivalence from our parents about any other options; therefore, we ate.

Make dinner conversation enjoyable.

This is not the time to admonish a child about her late homework assignment or to question her current choice of friends. This is the time to share ideas and tell stories. This is an opportunity to have that quality time we hear so much about but often don't have time to pursue.

Teach good table manners at home, and miraculously, your children will use good manners in public.

If you wouldn't think it funny to have your child display his mouthful of food to your hosts at a dinner party, I suggest not letting him get away with it at home.

Relax your attitude about food.

The more focus and attention you place on eating habits, the more of a battleground food will become. Keep a few important points in mind: Kids need to eat more often than three square meals. Kids can thrive eating the same foods over and over and avoiding anything new and different. Kids are hungry when they walk in the door after school - the routine of a healthy after-school snack can ward off all kinds of battles. When healthy options are all that's available, kids will eat healthy food. Mealtime can be enjoyable when you serve the food, then simply take the time to enjoy it, without monitoring everyone else's eating habits.

Encourage your children to become involved in the meal planning and preparation.

It will motivate them to eat what's served, and it will teach them valuable skills that will enrich their lives. You will probably be pleased to see that they actually enjoy helping in the kitchen.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of "Kid Cooperation and Perfect Parenting."

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