



Why You Don't Have to Work So Hard to Get Your Kids to Eat

Research shows that trying to get kids to eat (pressure) can make them do less well with eating.¹ Pressure often goes along with nutrition and growth worries. *We were told to encourage him but it's not working. How can I know if I'm doing the right thing?*

Obvious pressure is easier to spot and stop (it tends to feel bad).

Yelling at kids to eat; threats; bribes; taking away desserts; withdrawing attention, affection, or video game time; making kids feel guilt or shame... These methods don't help children do their best with eating.

Even gentle persuasion can make their eating worse.

Stickers, praise, rewards, games ("Who can crunch the loudest!" and, "Let's use our dinosaur teeth!"), nutrition talk ("Chicken makes you strong!"), food art and food science activities, negotiating, comparing to siblings... These may seem like encouragement, but can invite conflict and kids may push back.

How can you tell if your child feels pressured?

Ask Yourself	Remember To
<p>"Why am I doing this?"</p> <p>If the answer is to try to get your child to eat or taste a food, they will likely experience it as pressure.</p>	<p>Leave how much and what they eat (from what you provide) to them.</p>
<p>"How is my child responding?"</p> <p>Really observe. Are they happy, calm, engaged? Are they stalling, whining, and eager to leave the table?</p>	<p>Stay attuned to help you know.</p>
<p>Is this inviting connection with my child, or conflict?"</p> <p>Battling over bites or tastes doesn't help. Picky eating and conflict go hand-in-hand.² Reduced enjoyment of meals is associated with worse eating.³</p>	<p>Prioritize a calm and positive environment at meal and snack times. Focus on connecting with your child.</p>

Good news! You don't have to work so hard.

Leave what and how much up to them, stay attuned, and prioritize calm and connected meals and snacks. Raising kids to be their most confident and capable-eating selves is a long-term goal.

1. Lafraire, J., Rioux, C., Giboreau, A., & Picard, D. (2016). Food rejections in children: Cognitive and social/environmental factors involved in food neophobia and picky/fussy eating behavior. *Appetite*, 96, 347-357.
2. Zucker, N., Copeland, W., Franz, L., Carpenter, K., Keeling, L., Angold, A., & Egger, H. (2015). Psychological and psychosocial impairment in preschoolers with selective eating. *Pediatrics*, 136(3), e582-e590.
3. Van der Horst, K. (2012). Overcoming picky eating. Eating enjoyment as a central aspect of children's eating behaviors. *Appetite*, 58(2), 567-574.

This is an educational resource not meant to replace care from a child's healthcare team.

