

Food for Thought

What is mindful eating?

- Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food preparation and consumption by respecting your own inner wisdom.
- Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body by using all your senses to explore, savor and taste.
- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating.
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, neutral or dislikes) without judgment.



Free Handout for Families from The Center for Mindful Eating

Bite-Sized Manners

Megrette Hammond MEd, RD, CDE and Cheryl Alto, MS, RD

Children love to play. They play all the time, so it is not surprising that your child wants to play during the meal. Your child's curiosity stands as evidence that his mind is working and creating new connections.



However, it can be frustrating.

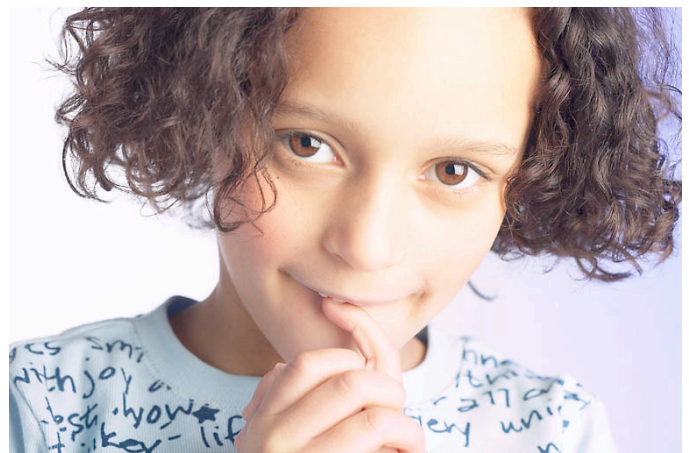
Often this blessing creates interruptions, conflict or a mess that distracts your attention away from enjoying the meal.

Many parents wonder how to find a balance between allowing their child to explore food and limiting unnecessary distraction. Below are some ideas for you and your family to consider.

First spend some time

with your partner and think about what type of structure you would like to add to the meal. Try to start this conversation without any thoughts that there is a 'right' or 'wrong' way to eat. Instead identify one or two areas to focus on that would help you and your family enjoy the meal.

Explaining your intent to your child is the next step. Children are very perceptive creatures. Try not to create goals that increase meal time pressure. Children can often sense and feel your stress or tension. Consider this as you evaluate what changes you would like to make at the table. The intent of having meal



time manners is so everyone can enjoy the meal -- including yourself.

Children and adults learn from consistent repetition. For this reason, let go of any notion that the moment you talk to your child he will understand and never, never play with his food again.

Create one or two phrases that you can say over and over again that helps you verbalize your intent. Consider the following, "Using our manners allows everyone to enjoy the meal." or "You need to stop because I am not able to enjoy my meal when you eat that way." or "Toys at the table distract us from the bite in our mouths."

Parents agree that making meal times enjoyable is an important step, but most wonder --how?

Try cultivating your child's curiosity in the eating. Start small, for example, with the bite in his mouth then slowly build on your success.



- Notice and explore how your child creates and selects a bite. Talk with your child to help him cultivate curiosity in the eating experience. Try having him describe his ways to take different bites. For example, did he use his teeth to bite the sandwich, or lips? What kinds of food would you need to bite? What kinds of food feel good in your mouth?

- Explore with your child the size of the bite selected. Ask your child, "Did it feel too small, too big or was it just the right size?"

During the meal talk with your child why he or she might take big or small bites. Listen fully to his answer. Help him to trust how much food to choose. Every day he is growing and his intake is constantly changing...some days will bring bigger bites, other days less. Also, foods of different textures and consistencies can be enjoyed with different bite sizes. For example, a child might do fine eating a larger bite of pudding than chewy meat. Helping him learn what foods are easier to enjoy in smaller bites can help him enjoy his meal.

Often when a child has too much food in his mouth, he may not know what to do, creating fear and uncertainty at the meal. Talking with your child about different ways of handling having too much food in his mouth. For example, you can remind your child to use a napkin to remove unwanted food from his or her mouth.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Maya Angelou

- Once a bite has been taken, help your child create the habit of putting the silverware or remaining food down. Have your child chew the food in his mouth without the distraction of preparing the next bite. This time between bites is also an opportunity to have your child check in with his hunger or fullness.
- After he has swallowed, help him create a pause in his eating. This can be done by helping all at the table to relax by offering gentle verbal reminders to enjoy and savor their selection. Slowing down allows for meal time observations and pleasant conversation offers pace and rhythm to the eating experience.

Creating your own bite-size goals.

Meal times can be a very busy and overwhelming time for a parent. It is important to remember that you also get to enjoy your meal. Believe it or not your ability to model eating and enjoying food is as important as anything you say. Children learn by watching other people and they will learn a lot by watching you select, taste and savor the food you serve.

Small goals can ease the pressure and burden many parents feel to encourage and enforce good meal-time manners. Keep in mind the reason for having meal-time manners is not to have "a well-behaved kid," it is to enjoy your meal AND your family's company. The key thing, whatever you decide to do, is to explore, experiment and have fun!

Internet Resources

Mindful Eating

www.tcme.org

www.ellynsatter.com/

www.med.umich.edu/umim/clinicalpyramid/index.htm

www.foundationsnutrition.com

Body Image

www.beyondhunger.org

www.bodypositive.com

www.hugs.com

www.healthybodyimage.com