ABSTRACT · Large print · 16 point

Growing Healthy Eaters

The central idea

Healthy relationships with food grow through curiosity, participation, and trust—not through pressure to taste, finish, or earn particular foods.

A supportive relationship with food includes curiosity, participation, culture, and trust. It cannot be measured by a perfect plate or by whether a child agrees to taste something new. Adults provide regular, suitable opportunities to eat while respecting the child's communication and individual needs. Pressure to finish, earn, or perform gratitude can move attention away from that relationship.

The brief invites families to explore food through more than eating. Looking, smelling, touching, choosing, washing, or helping prepare may all offer meaningful participation. A child can become familiar with a food without tasting it. Caregivers can also reflect on the messages they carry about bodies, portions, and 'good' or 'bad' foods, and consider how those messages shape the table.

Ideas for everyday practice

Offer structure with room for bodily agency. Provide appropriate food opportunities and child-sized starting portions, with responsiveness to hunger, fullness, and established care needs. Avoid using a preferred food as a prize for eating another food or requiring a clean plate.

Invite the child into a safe part of the food journey. Choosing an item, watching a plant grow, washing suitable produce, or helping with preparation can build familiarity. Participation should not create an obligation to taste or like the result.

Use color and sensory qualities as invitations rather than nutrition tests. Talk about different forms, textures, and family food traditions with curiosity. Adults can model enjoyment and openness without making their own eating a standard the child must copy.

One small invitation

Try a Rainbow Chef Night with suitable foods. Invite children to choose colors, help prepare, arrange, or share. Notice the experience and the contributions, rather than counting colors eaten or judging how adventurous someone was.

Learn · Connect · Grow

Learn. What messages about food and bodies are present at our table?

Connect. How can this child participate without pressure to eat?

Grow. What could make our next food experience more supportive?

Care and safety

Adapt food, portions, tools, and tasks to allergies, choking risks, sensory needs, and medical or feeding plans. Seek qualified support for persistent or serious feeding concerns. General encouragement to explore food does not replace individualized care.

These are possibilities for practice, not prescribed outcomes or guaranteed results. This abstract is educational and does not replace individualized professional advice. Seek appropriate emergency or crisis assistance when anyone may be in immediate danger.

Continue reading

Read the full brief and its research sources

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