

Healthier Communities To

The Quality Children and Community Health Center - New Orleans

Picky Eating is Normal! Learn How to Cope!

By Jessie Robinson, CM District Nutritionist

Picky eating is a normal childhood behavior and cannot be cured. Parents need to learn how to cope. Some skills that can be learned are:

- A child's natural appetite can be trusted
- That a healthy diet actually consists of
- How to offer what you want your child to eat
- When and how to say no

Normal childhood behavior

Children's growth slows after the first year, therefore children need relatively fewer calories after the first year. The child's natural appetite will decrease as the caloric need decreases. Children have food jags. This may mean a few weeks of macaroni and cheese or spaghetti as a favorite food. Continue to offer other foods with the child's preference and he/she will soon choose a new favorite.

Babies are born with a natural preference for sweets. Offer cereal, vegetables, and even fruits before introducing fruit. Avoid other sweets until a child is at least a year old, then limit to occasional treats. Healthy foods from the food pyramid are important for growth and development. Never put juice, soda, or other sweet drinks in a bottle.

Children may be resistant to trying new foods. Re-expose it, taking being introduced to a new food as early as fifteen times before a child acquires a taste for a new food.

Young children do not usually eat three full meals a day. Two meals and a couple of snacks may be all the child eats. A young child's appetite decreases as the day goes on, so they tend to eat less at the evening meal. Re-expose the child's natural appetite and offer healthy foods.

Everyone has a different eating pattern, so learn what pattern suits your child best.

Motivate Your Child To Success

Adapted from "Motivating Your Child To Success," For Parents On Series, Booklet published by the Bureau for At-Risk Youth, 1994.

A successful child is a child that has an inner sense of confidence, sees himself as important in his world, is able to see himself as successful at whatever he's doing, and faces the problems and stresses of everyday life without falling apart.

Success starts with the family. Do not shelter your children from the sometimes unpleasant facts of life. Rather, help children learn coping skills, deal with stresses in positive ways, and talk about their feelings.

Motivating children to succeed means creating an atmosphere of optimism and hope for the child. By mixing the following ingredients together with your love and support, you'll give your child a good start:

- Offer children opportunities to learn and succeed at all kinds of skills in sports, play, music, art, work, and schoolwork.
- Encourage your child to take advantage of activities in and outside of school in order to have new experiences.
- Participate with your child in all kinds of activities and have fun together doing them.
- Promote a good sense of values such as decency, honesty, responsibility, and respect, and caring for others.
- Try to keep a strong bond between family members. Children learn by imitating.

The wrong words can hurt when you are trying to motivate your child to be successful, so avoid phrases like these: "Quit while you're ahead," "One failure always a failure," "You'll never amount to anything," "You're worthless," "You're going nowhere," "Fast and furious," "I don't care how you feel." Encourage and support your children as they take steps to grow. Let your children know that you're on their side and reassure them what it felt like to be their age. Share your own learning experiences and successes. Share stories that show you understand your child's achievement anxieties. Don't compare your child to other children. No one likes to feel inadequate, especially when compared to someone more successful. Your goal is to motivate, not to add to your child's self-doubt. Share your own efforts and challenges. Tell your child about the steps you are taking to reach your

goals at home and at work. Let your child's confidence grow by building on all successes. Break goals down into smaller, easier tasks. Give your child a chance to practice, being successful, by experiencing the rewards of all efforts and feeling good about them. Teach your child that all achievements are the stepping stones to success.

Another way of motivating children is to teach them to be responsible for themselves in these ways:

- Start early. Even preschoolers can learn some basics of responsibility, like getting dressed or bringing a toy along with them.
- Start small. Don't expect too much too soon.
- Don't do for a child what he can do for himself. It takes away the child's energy and desire to succeed.
- Let your child experience the consequences of irresponsibility. This is a good learning tool for the next time.
- Give your child choices.
- Offer praise for a task well done.
- Set a good example with your own responsible behavior.

Some parents mistakenly believe that it is better to keep children from trying something new than to risk letting them fail. But children who learn to deal constructively with failures also learn how to turn their failures into successes. Parents can help motivate their children by keeping these three parenting pointers in mind:

- Let children take responsibility for their successes and for their failures.
- Help children grow from each experience, by letting them express their fears, sadness, frustration, and anger, as well as their happiness, pride, or satisfaction.
- Give children opportunities to try and try again.

Remember that no child is successful all the time. Learning to be successful is a lifetime job for all of us.

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