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## **KEY PHRASES FOR CREATING A POSITIVE FEEDING EXPERIENCE**

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How we talk to our children during meals is very critical. The words we use need to be **teaching words**, meant to help our children learn what it is that they need to be doing specifically at meals. **OUR GOAL** = to advance a child up the "**Steps To Eating**" without using ... *Questions, or Negative Instructions, Demands or Commands*

### **"YOU CAN" Replace as many of your questions with "YOU CAN" vs "can you?"**

- 1 - the "you can" phrase implies confidence that our child can do the task being shown them; it avoids the interruption of asking a question because it is a statement instead; it avoids the power struggle you set yourself up for by asking a question
- 2 - if they reply with "no, I can't", you can just say "when you are ready, I believe you can!" And avoid that power struggle all together
- 3 - talk about others CAN too = "Joey can (describe action)", "We can. (describe action)"
- 4 - ask **ONLY** choice questions ("do you want A or B") and **ONLY** when the child is **NOT** already eating
- 5 - REMEMBER - if "no" is not an acceptable answer, don't ask it as a question!

**QUESTIONS:** need to be avoided because...

- they interrupt children eating who know they are expected to answer our questions to them, even if they chose not to respond. **We never want to interrupt a child eating !**
- they set us up to power struggle with our children. What do you do when they answer with a "no"? If you let the "no" stand, they don't eat. If you disregard the "no" and push them, not only are you going to power struggle, but you are also invalidating the opinion YOU JUST ASKED FOR with your question.
- "Can You....?" is the most frequent question parents use. This question, in particular, implies a lack of confidence on our part as to whether our child really can do this eating task. That lack of confidence is imparted to our child with this question.

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**NEUTRAL OR POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE: use language that is focused on teaching your child about the sensory properties of the food and the mechanics of how the food breaks apart/moves AND how this food is similar to a known food**

- 1 - give the food a name and describe what it looks like (color, shape, size, texture)
- 2 - "**Teach the Physics of Food**" = explore the food with your hands and eyes. Can you bang it on the table, or is it wiggly? Does it crush into powder, or squish into mush? Does it feel bumpy, or smooth? Does powder stick to your fingers, or is it sticky? All of these different types of foods are going to work differently once the food gets into the mouth. We want your children to understand as much about the food as possible, and what is going to happen to the food once it gets into the mouth, BEFORE it gets in your child's mouth.

- 3 - If it is too threatening to talk about the child's food, talk about your own food and eating. Manipulate your own food with your hands and mouth. Teaching your child to eat is a **SHOW AND TELL** exercise. Remember, you are the Professor and every meal/snack is a classroom/teaching opportunity.
- 4 - If your child is struggling with a food (sensory or oral-motor wise), show them and tell them in explicit detail how to alternatively manage that food (e.g. "You look worried about that food. If it is making you worried, you can move it up here; you can cover it up"), (e.g. "Take a bite of that licorice from the side here with your strong back teeth. Hold it down tight in your teeth and then bite and pull"), (e.g. "See how I can take a bite of my chip and move my tongue sideways to put it on my big boy molars and now I can chew, chew, chew and then swallow it to my tummy").

**NEGATIVE DEMANDS OR COMMANDS:** need to be avoided because...

- a "do this or else" statement does little to create a positive mealtime atmosphere
- demanding a child do something in a negative fashion or tone of voice, often upsets them
- remember, your child's negative emotions are connected to the Adrenaline neurotransmitter system, which in turn directly suppresses appetite.

**We never want to do anything at a meal that is going to directly suppress appetite!**

- our demands and commands often times set us apart from our children at meals as the authority figure rather than helping them feel like we are joining them in tackling this difficult task. They also may give our children a sense that we feel they are stupid or silly (e.g. "take a bite already!"), or they may make our children feel as if we have no understanding of just how difficult a task eating is for them (e.g. "stop playing with your food and just eat it!").

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**"DO" LANGUAGE vs. Don't Language: use language that is rule based and helps your child understand the exact, correct behavior you expect. "Do language" tells the child the rule, rather than saying "stop", "don't", "no". It also then gives the appropriate behavior in specific terms.**

- 1 - instead of "stop throwing" say, "food stays on the table. If you don't want it, put it up here" Or, "push it away"
- 2 - instead of "sit down!" say, "chairs are for sitting, not standing. We sit on our bottoms in the chair".
- 3 - instead of "stop screaming" say, "we need to use an inside voice here. If something is upsetting you, you can use your words in an inside voice"
- 4 - instead of "don't spill that drink" say, "cups are for drinking. If you are going to spill, the cup will go over here until you are ready to actually take a drink"

**NEGATIVE INSTRUCTIONS:** need to be avoided because...

- they interrupt eating, they set you up for power struggles and they do not teach children WHAT TO DO. Negative instructions typically only teach children what NOT to do, WITHOUT providing a more appropriate alternative (eg. "stop screaming"; "don't throw", "stop that", "don't spill that drink").
- negative instructions usually deal with a maladaptive behavior after it has occurred and do not help to "set up" our children to be successful from the start.