



Words Matter +

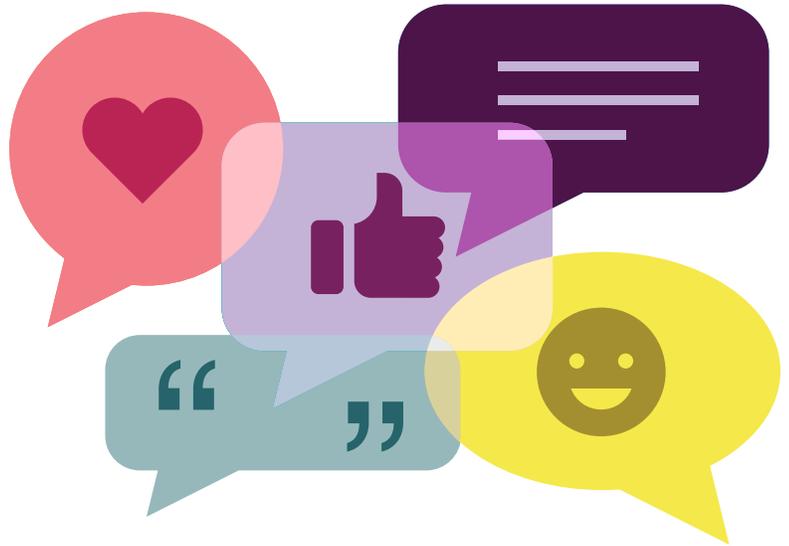
Talking About Food with Kids



The way we talk about food shapes how kids feel about eating. Positive words can encourage healthy habits, while negative ones can cause stress around mealtime. Here's how to keep conversations supportive and fun:

Try These “Helpful” Phrases:

- **Point out food qualities:**
“This kiwi is sweet like a strawberry.”
“These radishes are really crunchy!”
- **Encourage listening to their bodies:**
“Is your tummy still hungry?”
“Has your stomach had enough?”
- **Offer choices:**
“Which one is your favorite?”
“Everyone likes different foods.”
- **Give comfort without food:**
“I’m sorry you’re sad—come here for a big hug.”
“We’ll try those veggies another time.”



Avoid These “Hindering” Phrases:

- *“Eat that for me.”*
- *“If you don’t eat one more bite, I’ll be mad.”*
- *“No dessert until you eat your vegetables.”*
- *“Stop crying and I’ll give you a cookie.”*



These statements can teach kids to eat for approval, ignore their fullness, or use food as a reward—habits that may lead to unhealthy relationships with eating.

Bottom line: Focus on curiosity, choice, and kindness. Make food fun, not a fight!

* Adapted from “What You Say Really Matters?” in *Feeding Young Children in Group Settings*, Dr. Janice Fletcher and Dr. Laurel Brannen, University of Idaho.