

PREVENTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY - part 2

Teaching Children Positive Attitudes Toward Food

Training Curriculum: Survey Question 2

OBJECTIVES

1. Staff will be able to identify the parent's role in feeding toddlers and pre-schoolers and the child's role in eating.
2. Staff will be able to counsel care givers on feeding and parenting skills which will help children develop a positive attitude toward food and will help parents cope with mealtime behavior problems.

MATERIALS

Nutrition Education Plan Survey

Staff Reference Sheets:

Feeding Toddlers

Feeding Preschoolers

Participant Handouts:

When Your Child Won't Eat Well

Feeding Your Toddler

Feeding Your Preschooler

Teaching Your Child To Enjoy Mealtime!

Nutrition Education Module for Survey Question 2

BACKGROUND

Prior to the training session, have staff read the background material in the two Staff Reference Sheets. These sheets will provide the basic nutritional guidelines for feeding young children. Staff can use these sheets as a knowledge base to answer the discussion questions in this training session.

Introduce topic by asking the following questions as ice breakers.

What are some of the emotions parents may feel when their child doesn't eat well or creates stress at the table?

What are some common methods parents may employ to get their child to eat?

How effective are these methods?

How would you feel/react if someone forced you to eat?

Over the years, WIC staff have given participants information on the Food Guide Pyramid and what children *ought* to eat. However, *getting* children to eat it is another story! "Picky eater" and "poor table manners" are common complaints among participants. Parents need parenting tips along with the nutrition information.

Have staff break into groups. Tell them to come up with as many reasons that they can as to why children may not eat well at mealtime. Then discuss their answers with the large group, supplementing their answers with the following, if necessary.

- Maybe they aren't hungry!
Toddler's growth slows down significantly between 2 to 4 years old causing a dramatic decrease in appetite. Their appetite can also be quite sporadic. Parents often think something is wrong and become unnecessarily concerned.
- Maybe they want mom's potato chips instead!
Children learn to eat what they watch others eating.
- Maybe they are just too tired or too excited!
Most children prefer to play, watch TV, and when tired, to sleep than eat. Also they cannot sit still for very long.
- Maybe they want mom's attention.
If a parent shows concern over what the child doesn't eat, the child may continue to refuse to eat in order to get attention. Food may become a means of control.
- Maybe they want to find out if they can get something they like better later on.
A child will skip a meal if he knows he will get cookies an hour later.
- Maybe they have been served too much food.
Adult size servings can seem like a mountain of food to a child.
- Maybe he is being told to eat something he doesn't like.
Being forced to eat something teaches children to dislike what they should learn to enjoy.
- Maybe it looks 'suspicious.'
Children are naturally 'afraid' to try new foods. Swallowing something 'strange' is 'risky business' to a child!
- Maybe the food is too hard to chew or handle.
- Maybe they prefer the taste of salty and sweet foods.

Children have reasons for not eating. By addressing the underlying reason, parents can help to eliminate mealtime problems. (However, children may also refuse to eat due to emotional/family problems. This module is not designed to address serious behavior problems. It is designed to promote good eating habits and mealtime behaviors among children by helping parents understand their role in feeding their child and their child's role in eating.)

Problems with mealtime and poor attitudes toward food often develop when parents confuse their role in feeding their child with their child's role in eating.

Based on what you read in the Staff Reference Sheets, who controls what foods are offered?
The parent.

What is the child's role?

The child decides whether or not to eat and how much to eat.

The Reference Sheets and the flyer "Teaching Your Child to Enjoy Mealtime" provide some good tips to help put parents in control of what foods are offered. *Have staff take a few minutes to review the flyer and encourage them to become familiar with the information.*

When conversing with parents, you may discover that the child is in control instead. How would you respond if the parent says *Allow staff to respond to the questions and supplement with the information below each statement.*

"My child won't eat what I serve."

Continue to buy and offer healthy foods. If your child wants something else, say, "these are the choices, which ones do you want?" Have him wait until the next meal if he refuses what is offered. Your child will refuse to eat healthy foods if he can get chips and soda later on.

Allow the child to choose between several healthy options at meals and snacks.

Keep offering healthy foods, even if rejected, encouraging the child to taste it without forcing it. Children may have to taste a food 10 or more times before accepting it.

Make the food easy for your child to chew and handle. Cut the food up in small pieces before putting it on the plate. Then allow your child to feed himself.

"My child just picks at his food. He hardly eats anything."

Children have small stomachs and small appetites. They need small portions. Children who grow are getting enough to eat. (Show the parent the child's growth grid. Offer to weigh and measure the child if she is concerned.)

Children eat when they get hungry. They will not starve themselves. Offer healthy foods. Let your child decide if he is hungry.

"My child acts up at mealtime."

Toddlers love attention. The more parents fuss over what children do not eat, the more likely they are to not eat in order to get attention. Give attention by praising good mealtime behavior, eating with your child, and not fussing over uneaten foods.

Allow your child to help wash vegetables, set the table, etc. Children are more willing to eat a meal that they have helped to prepare.

Children cannot sit still for long. Plan a quiet activity for them at the table until everyone is done eating.

If children eat while watching TV, they get distracted and they tend to overeat. Mealtime is an important time for children to learn to interact with others and to follow their hunger cues. Turn the TV off while eating!

Hungry children can get grumpy. Grumpy children will not eat well. If your child gets grumpy or hungry right before dinner, try rearranging the meal and snack schedule. Snacks help make children less grumpy at mealtime.

Children can also get grumpy when they are tired or over excited. Plan a quiet activity right before meals.

The Reference Sheets and the flyer provide some good parenting information regarding child feeding. These tips are helpful, *if* parents use them. However, parents may come up with excuses as to why these ideas will *not* work. According to a recent Food and Consumer Service research project using focus groups with low-income families, most mothers already know what foods their children *ought* to eat and would like to feed them healthy foods. However, findings from the focus groups indicate that mothers responded to their *children's* special food requests for several reasons: 1) Respondents in all ethnic groups agreed that it does not make sense to purchase food that children will not eat. 2) They also commented that when children like the food choices in the home, they are more likely to express appreciation, satisfaction and caring toward their parents. This, in turn, reinforces the parents' feelings of self-worth and satisfies their need to be needed. As a result, respondents were adamant about the role that their children have in selecting foods for the household even though they acknowledged that their children requested 'junk foods'.

In short, *nutrition* is educational, but *food* is emotional. When you review the tips with parents you may likely encounter excuses raised on an emotional level. How would you respond if the parents say . . . ?

Ask staff to share their own experiences as parents and their experiences discussing parenting issues with participants. Ask them to brainstorm to find possible options that they can share with parents for the situations listed below. Supplement with the suggestions listed.

“But, my child won’t eat healthy/new foods. I don’t want to see my money going down the drain.”

First find out if it is just the child or if the rest of the family doesn't want to eat the foods offered either. If the other adult members are not willing to change, then her attempts will not work with the child. Discuss the importance of getting cooperation from the rest of the family.

If just the child is unwilling to eat, suggest the following to the parent: It is hard to watch money go down the drain. But I also know that you want to do what is best for your child. Your child will soon accept what you offer if you stick with the program. A small, short-term investment going down the drain now will pay off in health benefits for your child that will last a lifetime.

“But, my kids *want* chips and soda. They get upset if I don't have treats at home. And they start whining.”

I can tell that you want your children to be happy. It feels bad to deny them what they want. But remember, children often want foods that taste good but are not good for them. Try to keep food out of the emotional arena. Comfort your child by playing with him and giving him your time instead. The more your child uses food as a comfort measure, the more unhealthy his food choices will become because kids naturally prefer sweet and salty treats. Treat your child's requests for junk food the same way you would treat other requests that are not good for him. What could you do to distract him instead?

“I try to feed my child right, but my mother spoils him. He gets all kinds of junk food over there. I don't know what to do about it.”

First, find out if this is just an occasional problem or if the grandmother takes care of the child on a regular basis. If it is occasional, it is not an issue. If it is a regular occurrence, provide the following advice: It sounds like your mother enjoys being a grandma. Grandmas love to nurture their grandkids and food is one way to do it. What kinds of fruits and other healthy foods do your child like which you feel are too expensive to buy all the time? Tell your mother that you wish you could buy these foods more often because your child really likes them but that you can't afford them. If you use a little psychology, you may be able to get *her* to buy foods that are healthy for your child and make her feel good at the same time.

“I try to feed my child right but my husband likes junk food and he brings it home.”

That must be very frustrating for you. What do you think your husband would do if you shared this flyer with him? Talk to your husband about being a positive example if you feel comfortable doing that. If not, at least keep the food out of sight and reach of your child.

Emphasize with staff that the most important part of the contact may be giving the parent ideas to help her deal with emotional issues that may seem beyond her control.

REVIEW OF NUTRITION EDUCATION MODULE AND HANDOUT

Hand out the module for question 2 and the flyer.

This module is designed to encourage families to eat together and to help them make mealtime pleasant. By making mealtime pleasant, children learn to develop healthy attitudes toward food.

Besides the reasons listed at the beginning of the flyer, why are family meals important?

Allow staff to share their own values about family mealtime.

What do you remember about your experiences around the family table, either good or bad?

Allow staff to respond with their own personal reasons (childhood memories) as to why family meals have an important impact on a child's eating behaviors and attitude toward food.

**How do you feel that participants, in general, will answer question 3 on the survey?
If you live with family, how often do you get together for meals?**

WIC participants face the same obstacles. Fewer and fewer American families actually sit down to socialize around the table.

If the participant says that she seldom sits down to eat with her child, the module directs staff to continue on with section 1. If the participant does have family meals on a regular basis, the module directs staff to skip the rest of section 1 and proceed to section 2.

Section 1 next instructs staff to ask participants what prevents them from eating together.

What prevents your family from eating together more often?

Allow staff to respond.

What could you do to overcome these obstacles?

Allow staff to respond. Supplement with ideas such as: Scheduling at least one meal together per week. Preparing the meal together as a family.

When you encourage WIC participants to have meals together, include the ideas presented in the module and some of the ones you mentioned here today.

As you encourage participants to eat together as a family and tell them it can be a *pleasant* time, some participants may be thinking about how *difficult* mealtime is because of how their toddler acts at the table. Perhaps the caregiver would prefer to avoid family meals because it turns into a battleground.

Tell me about your *worst* experience at a table with a *toddler*?

Allow staff to share their 'horror' stories!

WIC participants face the same challenges and some lack parenting skills. The opening question in section 2 of the module may lead to a discussion about what mealtimes are really like at home.

If the mother begins to discuss her problems, allow her to vent and then review the tips in the flyer.

Besides the tips in the flyer, what other ideas could you suggest? If you have children or nieces/nephews, etc. how do you handle mealtime problems?

Allow staff to share their ideas on parenting.

Note: If the participant states that mealtimes are pleasant, she may or may not be giving accurate information. To be on the safe side, briefly review the tips in the pamphlet on how to make mealtimes pleasant by explaining to her that these are some ideas *just in case* her child should become picky in the future.

After providing some tips, conclude the contact by asking the mother which ideas she will try.

PRACTICE SESSION - USING THE NUTRITION EDUCATION MODULE

Role-play the module in front of the group. Ask for volunteers to play the part of a typical caregiver while you play the more difficult part of the nutrition aide. (You may want to ask for some volunteers prior to the training session.)

For each role-play, the caregiver should have a different problem or situation. Some suggestions include:

"My kid just won't sit still"

"We just don't have time to eat as a family."

Be prepared to make some mistakes so staff realize that the role playing is a learning experience not a "command performance." After each role-play, get feedback from staff by asking the following questions:

What part of the contact did you especially like?

What could be done to improve the contact?

After doing several role-plays, divide the group into pairs and practice some role-plays on their own. If they are reluctant to do individual role-plays, do a 'group role-play' by dividing the group in half. Assign each 'half' to play the role of nutritionist or the parents. Keep the discussion between teams by asking questions such as the following:

You are the nutritionist who is about to discuss fast foods. How would you get started? (Tell them to refer to the module.) (Elicit response from the 'nutritionist group')

Then ask the participant group, "What might a participant say in return?" (Elicit response from participant group.)

Then ask the nutritionist group how they would respond to what the participant group said.

Continue working with the group, trying to get them accustomed to using the module.

Children and Mealtime: Survey Question 2

Section 1

You mentioned on the survey that you sit down to eat with your child about _____.

If the parent sits down to eat with her child every day, skip the rest of this section and proceed to section 2. If the parent sits down to eat with her child less than once a day, continue on with section 1.

What things stop you from eating together more often?

Allow parent to share. Lack of time may be a common concern.

Many parents feel strapped for time. Even eating meals together once or twice a week will help because family meals teach children important skills.

Share benefits listed in first section of "Teaching Your Child to Enjoy Mealtime."

What might you do to take time to eat with your child?

Allow parent to share. Supplement with other ideas such as scheduling time at least once a week. Turn a family meal into an activity by letting the children help prepare the meal.

Section 2

Tell me about mealtime at your house. How does your child act at mealtime?

Allow parent to share. Find out what mealtime is like at home. Is it hectic, tense or relaxing?

What do you do when your child doesn't eat well at mealtime?

Allow the parent to respond. Then share the tips in the flyer that pertain to her situation. (You may not have time to review all the tips. Pick out a few to pique her interest. She can read the rest on her own.) Also provide a copy of the brochures "When Your Child Won't Eat Well," "Feeding Your Toddler," or "Feeding Your Preschooler" as appropriate.

Which ideas will you try?

Feeding Toddlers

2-3 years old

WIC Staff Reference Sheet

Developmental Changes During the Toddler Years

Two words which best describe the developmental changes during the toddler period are "no" and "go"! The toddler has two main goals - to prove he is a separate person from his parents and to explore everything. Yet in contrast to his incredible activity, his growth rate is actually slowing down.

Toddlers usually grow about 2 to 3 inches and gain only 4 pounds per year. This is a decrease from the previous year's gains of 4 to 5 inches and 6 pounds. Appetite decreases as a result or may go up and down. Also, toddlers are much more interested in exploring than eating.

As toddlers discover they are separate individuals from their parents, they begin declaring their independence and testing their limits. Food can easily become an area which toddlers target for control. Mealtime problems can be avoided if parents set limits for their toddler but allow him to be his own person at the same time. Both the parent's role in feeding and the toddler's role in eating must be clearly defined or battles over food may ensue.

Parent's Role in Feeding the Toddler

Parents are responsible for deciding what foods to offer their toddler:

- Parents can control what their toddler eats by controlling the foods that are offered.
- A toddler will eat better if allowed to choose among several **healthy** options. If all the foods offered are refused, parents can wait until the next meal or snack.
- Toddlers may have to taste and explore a food ten or more times before accepting it. Parents should keep offering healthy foods, even if rejected at first, encouraging the child to taste it without forcing it.

Parents are responsible to decide when foods are offered:

- Plan meals and snacks at scheduled times. However, parents should schedule meals and snacks around times their child normally gets hungry. That way, their child learns to eat according to her own hunger cues, rather than according to the parent's schedule.
- Toddlers have small stomachs and cannot meet their nutritional needs in three meals. Snacks should be considered as mini-meals which contribute to his nutritional intake.
- If a child complains of being hungry right before a meal, parents can offer a small portion of one of the foods planned for meal. If the child really is hungry, she'll eat it. If she is just 'pan-handling', she will wait until dinner.
- Parents should avoid offering foods to bribe or reward their child. That way, their child learns that food is not for control.

Parents are responsible for setting the example:

- Toddlers want to eat what they see adults eating.

Parents are responsible for maintaining a pleasant mealtime atmosphere:

- A toddler eats better when rested. Parents can plan quiet activities right before meals or have their child rest before serving a meal.
- Parents should avoid offering food while watching TV. Mealtime is an important time for their child to learn how to interact with others. TV will distract their child.

- A toddler should be expected to sit at the table with the family for 20 to 30 minutes. However, they cannot sit still for long. Plan a quiet activity for the child at the table until the rest of the family is finished eating.
- Toddlers eat better when allowed to feed themselves. However, they will make a mess at the table as they learn how. Parents should be patient.
- If the child misbehaves, she should be removed from the table.

Toddler's Role in Eating

The toddler is responsible for deciding what he will eat from the foods offered and how much:

- The parent can control what foods are offered, but the toddler controls whether or not to eat them and how much. He should be respected for his food preferences just as adults are for theirs!
- A toddler's appetite depends on how he feels, how fast he is growing, and what the mealtime atmosphere is like. A healthy child will eat when he gets hungry!

If parents follow the guidelines listed above, many mealtime problems can be averted. However, a child who consistently refuses food in spite of taking the action above should be referred for professional evaluation.

Diet Recommendations

A toddler should be offered at least this many servings each day:

Bread, Cereal, Rice or Pasta..... 6 servings	Fruits..... 2 servings
Milk, Cheese, Yogurt 3 servings	Vegetables..... 3 servings
Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans or Eggs..... 2 servings	

Toddlers want to do everything themselves and succeed. They easily get frustrated if the food is hard to chew or handle or if they see too much food on their plate. Judicious choice of the kinds of foods offered and how they are served can make eating easier for a toddler and give him a feeling of success. The tips below will help:

- Toddlers are a lot smaller than adults! Count 2 to 3 tablespoons of each food as a serving. Serve quarter or half slices of bread.
- Use a child size cup and spoon and a plate with a rim.
- Let her eat with her hands if she prefers. Toddlers like to explore the texture and smell of food before actually eating it!
- Offer soft moist foods. Toddlers still have trouble chewing.
- Toddlers can choke easily. Avoid foods which are high risk for choking.
- Cut foods into bite size pieces before serving. Otherwise she will want to do it.
- Serve ground beef, chicken, fish, eggs and dried beans and peas. Meats are tough for toddlers to chew.
- Allow food to cool down. Most toddlers dislike foods served real hot.
- Toddlers are suspicious of food mixtures. They prefer plain foods they can examine before eating.

Feeding The Preschooler

WIC Staff Reference Sheet

Teaching Preschoolers about Nutrition

During the pre-school years, a child develops eating habits that will last into adulthood. Children at this age pay great attention to those around them. In fact, they may even mimic their eating habits.

The most effective way to teach nutrition to a preschooler is by being a good role model. Setting an example involves more than eating a healthy diet. It also means demonstrating good table manners and portraying a positive attitude toward food in general.

Preschoolers can also be taught about good nutrition through story books, coloring books, videos, children's cookbooks and food preparation "adventures." The more "fun" a child has learning about food and nutrition, the more likely he is to develop good eating habits.

Diet Recommendations

Both parent and child should get at least this many servings each day:

Bread, Cereal, Rice or Pasta.....	6 servings	Fruits.....	2 servings
Milk, Cheese, Yogurt	3 servings	Vegetables....	3 servings
Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans or Eggs.....	2 servings		

Pre-schoolers need the same kinds of foods as adults, but in smaller portions. A typical serving is a quarter cup of each food or half slices of bread. Recommended servings should be divided into 3 meals and in-between snacks at planned times each day.

Food Jags

Pre-schoolers can go through phases of rejecting certain foods previously liked or wanting the same food over and over again (food jags). Food jags are common and usually don't last long. Food preferences during a food jag should be accommodated within reason, but not to the point of compromising good nutrition.

A reasonable way to handle a food jag is to offer the child the preferred food at one of the meals. Alternatives should then be offered at the other meals. If the child refuses the alternatives, he should be made to wait until the next planned meal or snack. He will learn to accept a variety of foods.

Importance of Breakfast

Children who do not eat breakfast have been observed to be more lethargic and irritable in school than children who do. A 1989 study of the School Breakfast Program confirmed these performance observations by documenting that children who eat breakfast score better on tests.

It is suggested that this may be due to limited glycogen (sugar) stores in younger children as compared to adults. Glycogen stores, which are the brain's primary energy source during fasting, are depleted more quickly in children. This may account for poor school performance.

Shaping a Preschooler's Attitude toward Food

Parents can help their preschoolers develop a positive attitude toward food by providing them with **enjoyable** eating experiences. The following tips will help:

- Allow children to help in the kitchen.
Children's cookbooks may provide some interesting food projects suitable for a pre-schooler. Preschoolers can help to wash vegetables, measure ingredients and set the table. Helping with the preparation will increase willingness to try new foods.
- Allow children to decide whether or not they are hungry.
Serving small portions and not forcing food will provide positive eating experiences.
- Relate foods to things that pre-schoolers are familiar with.
For example, broccoli **trees** are more interesting than just plain broccoli, carrot **coins** than carrots, cheese **sticks** than cheese.
- Serve finger foods.
Although preschoolers can manage utensils, they still enjoy finger foods. Cut up fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator are a great way to keep quick snacks on hand. Many children prefer raw to cooked vegetables at meals too.
- Maintain a pleasant mealtime atmosphere.
During mealtime, parents should eliminate distractions, such as the TV, and **talk** to their preschooler. If he doesn't want to eat, he should still be required to sit at the table for a reasonable period of time and take part in the conversation. However, if he misbehaves he should be removed from the table, but not to go watch TV.
- Avoid using food as a reward, punishment or bribe.
To learn good eating habits, a child needs to enjoy eating. Bribes and rewards teach children that food is for control, not for enjoying. Preschoolers should be rewarded with hugs and kisses.

Teaching Your Child to *Enjoy* Mealtime!



Food is one of the joys of life. When families enjoy meals together, this is what children can learn:

- ♥ Family meals make children feel secure and loved. They learn how to care and share. Children who help prepare meals and set the table also learn important life skills. Children love to help.
- ♥ Family meals promote good eating habits and teach children to like healthy foods. Family meals also teach children eye-hand coordination and table manners.

Family meals should be *fun*. But, the more you fuss over what your child does not eat, the more he may refuse in order to get attention. Here are some ways your family can *enjoy* mealtimes.

- ♥ Offer *healthy* choices for both meals and snacks. Be firm. If your child wants something else, say, “These are the choices. Which do you want?” If your child does not eat, don’t worry. She will not starve herself, but she will eat poorly at meals if she gets soda and chips in between.
- ♥ Schedule meals and snacks at times your child usually gets hungry. If he refuses, wait until the next planned time. Stick to the schedule. If your child whines, remind him that he chose not to eat and that he will have another chance later on. Hungry children learn to satisfy their hunger by eating what you offer.
- ♥ Avoid watching TV while eating. TV distracts children and makes them tend to overeat.
- ♥ Serve *small* portions. Big portions overwhelm small children. If you are concerned about how little your child eats, ask WIC to check her growth. If your child is growing, she is eating enough for her size.
- ♥ Young children cannot sit still for very long. When your child is finished eating, have a quiet activity planned, like coloring, until the rest of the family finishes eating.
- ♥ Children like to feed themselves and enjoy exploring food with their fingers. Cut the food in small pieces before you put it on the plate. Offer utensils but don’t make your child use them. Expect a mess!
- ♥ Respect your child’s food likes and dislikes even if they are different from your own. Forcing your child to eat makes mealtime unpleasant for everyone and makes your child less willing to try new foods.
- ♥ Your child may refuse a new food the first few times you offer it. Be patient. She may have to see, touch and taste a new food ten or more times. Keep offering it and praise your child when she tries a new food.
- ♥ Avoid using food as a bribe or a reward. That way, your child will learn to enjoy food rather than use it for attention or control.

The Pennsylvania WIC Program
1-800-WIC-WINS



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