



Table Talk: A Novel Approach for Helping Kids Eat Well

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Overview & Objectives


- Learn a novel approach to help kids develop skills of healthy eating.
- Gain new ways to manage kids' food resistance and rejection.
- Teach clients practices that positively engage kids in trying new foods.
- Q&A/Discussion



What's one food you dislike?

Color, texture, smell...

What adjectives describe your sensory experience of this food?



Common *Table Talk*

- “Try this, you might like it!”
- “You liked it last time!?”
- “You don’t know unless you try!”
- “Take two bites if you want dessert.”
- “I think you’re really going to like it!”
- “But you didn’t even taste it?!”
- “Good job eating that!”



“Table Talk”



What we say to kids about their eating while they're eating.

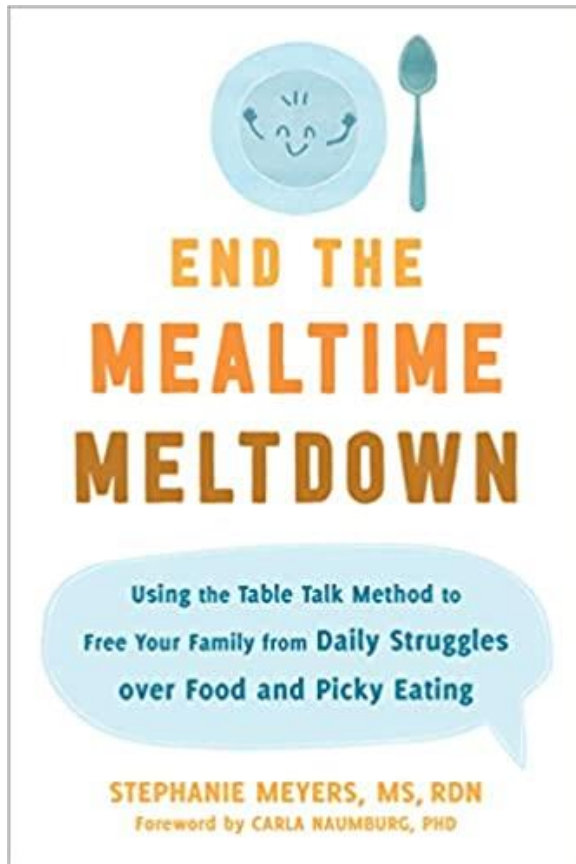


Eight Types of Typical *Table Talk*

Type	Message	Example Quote
Instructive	Do this.	“Please use your fork.”
Corrective	Not that.	“Don’t take such big bites.”
Praise	Good job/I’m proud!	“Way to go eating your vegetables!”
Conditional	If you do X, then you get Y.	“Two more bites of chicken then you can have more pasta.”
Obligatory	You must eat it.	“Just try one bite…”
Expectant	This is how you could feel/felt before.	“This tastes just like X, which you like.”
Appreciative	I’m grateful for how/what you’re eating.	“Thank you for tasting it!”
Closed-ended questions	Elicits Yes/No response	“Did you try the soup?”



Learning New *Table Talk* helps



- Reduce mealtime stress.
- Improve how and what kids eat.
- Teach kids eating-related *skills*.



Skills of Eating Well

- Willingness to explore new foods.
- Less rigidity as an eater.
- Ways to cope when food is displeasing.
- Recognizing hunger and fullness.
 - Knowing how much food to take and eat.
- Prioritizing pleasure and joy with food.
- Being kind to yourself as an eater.



What's one food your child usually rejects?

“I'm not eating _____!”

“I don't like _____!”



New Table Talk: Use open-ended prompts

“What do you notice?”

“Tell me about...”



Dealing with Food Resistance/Rejection

“Which
part?”

“What would
help it?”



The “Add-On” Approach

“What would help it?”

- A small amount of a condiment-style food kids can add at the table, such as:
 - Lemon or lime, tzatziki, raita, guacamole, salsa, mustard, crushed nuts/cereal/sesame sticks, shredded coconut
- Solutions that aren’t food based.
 - Sitting on your lap, a different utensil, permission to use hands



How to Deal with Food Rejection

When kids fuss about food, say:

“What do you notice...” or, *“Tell me about...”*

Then listen, deeply.

If needed, ask: *“What would help it?”*

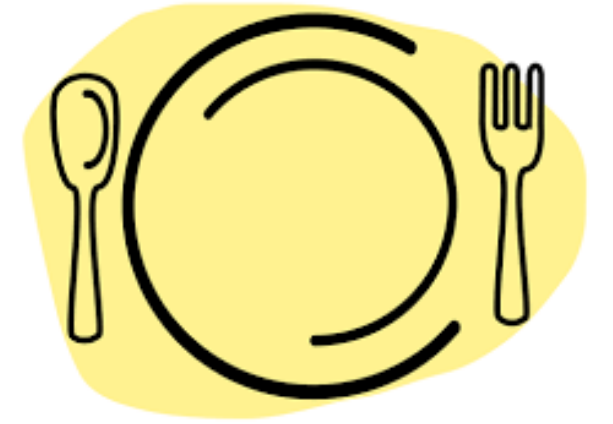
If they reply, **“NOTHING!”** say:

“It’s okay to leave it.” or, *“It’s okay if you don’t eat it.”*



New *Table Talk* Provides

- Options-based action steps to cope with food frustration.
- Kids taking agency during tough moments with food.
- Simple choices that honor kids' self-governance as eaters.
- Alternatives to negotiation and disengagement.
- Better parent-child interactions.
- Less tension for everyone at the table!



How do kids learn to care for themselves as eaters?

How do we influence that process as caregivers?



Serve Vegetables First

“I’m SO hungry!”

- Serve steamed, roasted or raw vegetables
- Bowl or tray at the center of the table
- Allow child to serve themselves
 - Child-size tongs or compelling utensils





Say:

- “Roasted broccoli is on the table.”
- “Help yourself to the veggies in the fridge.”
- “Salad is ready – let’s start with that while everything else finishes cooking.”

If you don’t have vegetables prepped, say:

“Saving some hungry for dinner, which will be ready in ten minutes.”



Avoid Disguise and Surprise

- Spinach in brownies
 - Cauliflower in meatballs
 - Kale in smoothies
- Messages kids get when food is disguised:
 - Veggies taste awful so you must hide them.
 - “Ultimate” foods
 - Trickery is not a reliable game plan for teaching healthy habit formation.



Say:

- “This has a surprise ingredient—what do you think it is?”
- “I tried something new with the meatballs; It’s X, chopped up small.
 - What do you notice?
 - How is this for you?”
- “I’m thinking of new vegetable ideas. How do you feel about X?”
- “What’s the most interesting way you’ve ever seen, smelled, or tasted Y?”



Eating Below the Eyebrow Line

Five-senses based eating is a building block for new table talk.



Sensory Observations Inform New *Table Talk*

- “How do those noodles feel?”
- “How’s the kiwi smell to you?”
- “What do your eyes notice with these raisins?”
- “What flavor/smell/texture are you sensing?”
- “I’m curious how that bite sounds?”



New *Table Talk*: Adjectives

- Use descriptive words that capture what your senses observe with food.
- Different from:
 - “Like/dislike”
 - “Good/bad”
 - “Healthy/unhealthy”

Sight – fluffy, wet

Smell – minty, fresh

Flavor – juicy, tangy

Touch – smooth, gooey

Sound – crunchy, chewy



Maddie, Age 6

Intake lacks
variety

Reluctant to
try new foods

Drinks a lot of
milk instead
of eating



Putting New *Table Talk* into Practice...

“What do you notice?”

“Tell me about...”

“It’s cold and creamy”

“How can we get cold and creamy happening with other foods?”



Joel, age 8

Skimps on dinner,
“holding out” for a
bedtime snack

- “I want yogurt!”

Use adjectives:

- *“It sounds like you want cold, smooth, and sweet”*



New Table Talk: Reflective Statements

“It sounds
like...”

“It seems like...”



Let's Practice...

“That’s enough pasta, you need to eat some veggies.”



Lead with a reflective statement

“It seems like the pasta is spot-on for you tonight...”

+

“What are you noticing with the veggies?”

or

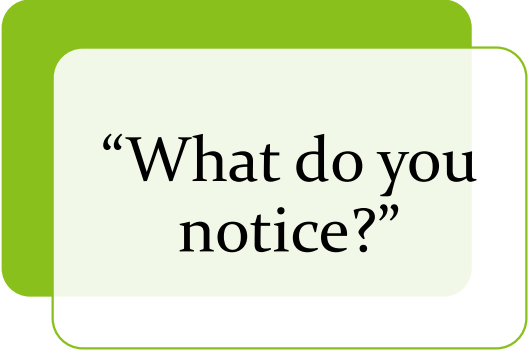
“Tell me about the veggies for you...”



“It seems like...”



“It sounds like...”



“What do you notice?”



“Tell me about...”



Reflective statements help you get unstuck

When kids say...

- “Why do we always have to eat X?”
- “Why can’t I have more chips?!”

Use a reflective statement...

- “It seems like there’s trouble with the tofu; What would help it?”
- “It sounds like crunchy and salty are really calling to you right now...”

Gastronomic Intelligence



- Your inner compass with food
- Intrinsic attribute
- 3 components:
 - Satisfaction
 - Self-trust
 - Self-compassion
- Table talk is the most direct way we affect GI in kids



How Gastronomic Intelligence Relates to Mealtimes Struggles

GI is the inner resource used to work through experiences of food.

Better table talk doesn't feed a fight.

- Satisfaction
 - “What would help it?”
 - “How can we get what you enjoy about X happening with Y?”
- Self-trust
 - “What’s helping you feel full?”
- Self-compassion
 - “It seems like the stew isn’t doing it for you. What are you noticing?”



New *Table Talk* Feeds a New Inner Dialogue

- “What do I notice with this food?”
- “How does X look/smell/feel or sounds for me?”
- “What would satisfy me in this moment of eating?”
- “Where’s hunger/fullness showing up in my body?”





New *Table Talk*: ING-verbs

- One word *or* the first word of your new table talk
 - Paired with you miming the action or offering a gentle suggestion
 - Use when you get the urge to change or correct something about your child's eating
- “Wiping”
 - “Chewing” or “Closing”
 - “Sitting”
 - “Leaning”
 - “Leaving those bits here...”
 - “Working with what’s on your plate/the table..”



New Table Talk Action Steps

1. Begin with **open-ended prompts**

- “What do you notice?”
- “Tell me about...”
- “What would help it?”

2. Use **adjectives** based on your own sensory experiences with food.

- “For me this is tangy and smooth; What’s the feeling for you? ”

3. Pair **reflective statements** with open-ended questions.

- “It seems like the salad isn’t doing it for you; I’m curious what you [feel/see/smell/hear]?”



Questions?

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