

***BEAUTIFUL SAVIOR
LUTHERAN SCHOOL
PRESENTS:
PEARLS OF LOVE AND LOGIC
Special Thoughts on Raising Kids***

“Finish Your Beets!” Avoiding Struggles Around Food

I feel sadder about family disagreements around food than any other single issue. Such fights are generally unnecessary and can easily be prevented. I will give you four guidelines on handling food, but first I want to explore some important thoughts about food.

There are many examples of the connection between food and love. We say, “I love you, Sweetheart,” or, “You’re the frosting on my cake.” Yet, when people fight around food, the important connection between love and food is lost.

Too many of us eat in a rush. In the old days, families would sit and talk, recapping the day, spinning yarns, enjoying each other. We ought to be relaxed at meal times, showing love and affection around food.

Guideline 1:

Saying, “Try it, you’ll like it,” is not helpful and generally not true - People’s tastes change naturally with age, not through learning. Children and adults have taste buds of differing sensitivity. One doesn’t find the average child lapping up eggplant, some cheeses, or sweetbreads. About one-fourth of all adults remember, as children, not being able to stomach the feel of tapioca in their mouths. To a child it simply feels “gushy,” or “icky.” I remember my grandfather telling me, as a child, to put a pill, “way in the back of your mouth so you won’t taste it.” I tried it. Was I ever surprised! I thought, “My grandpa lied! He thought I wouldn’t taste it.” Not only do children’s and adults’ taste buds differ in sensitivity, but placement of primary taste also changes as a child grows older. Children go around looking like chipmunks with gumballs jammed back into their jaw because that’s where they taste food. In contrast, adults taste most acutely on the tips of the tongue.

Guideline 2:

Give information about food before prohibitions and orders - For instance, it might be wise to say, “When kids eat so little before dessert and then eat a lot of sweets, they don’t get much vitamin D. Their bones turn soft. You could probably still walk, Jake, without collapsing, but I’m sure glad I eat good stuff before I layer it with sugar or I might be pretty weak myself!” Sometimes parents may have to use rules around food. However, it is important to remember that, as our children grow older, we will never, but never, be able to control what they put into their mouths. Children need to learn to make their own good rules about what they eat.

Guideline 3:

Anger and frustration around food issues almost always make the problem worse - I’ll never forget the mother who brought her child to see me. Sitting in the waiting room, while I saw his mother, the child bought a soda. When his mother finished her part of the session, she spied him sipping his soda, while quietly reading a magazine. Mom became hysterical. She wailed, “He’ll become hyper, he’ll become hyper.” The boy started shaking. I started shaking. Mom was shaking. We were all hyper. Contrast this with the parent who says, “Wow! You didn’t eat any sweets until dinnertime! I bet you’re proud of yourself! That’s hard to do!”

Guideline 4 :

Use natural consequences for food fads and other food problems only if encouragement and talking things over has not worked - Parents can use consequences such as: “If all you want to eat is hamburger, you’ll probably need to fix it yourself.” Or, “I’ll pay half for all the sugar-coated cereals you want. If you want them bad enough to earn the other half of what they cost, great!” Most of us eat what we need. Obesity and weight problems correlate most with genetics. Keeping this in mind, we can come to see that many food fights with our children are avoidable and unnecessary.

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