

Things to Say (and not to say) in School Cafeterias

Adapted from "[How Mealtimes Can Set the Stage for Better Learning, Behavior, and Health in Children](#),"
Montana Team Nutrition, 2011



Meals consumed at school are essential to the growth of the whole child. School staff and volunteers can help students develop healthy relationships with food. All children deserve to eat lunch in a welcoming and positive surrounding. Given time, support, and encouragement, students can practice becoming healthy eaters.

Healthy and Positive Mealtime Approach – Information adapted from Ellyn Satter’s Approach to Feeding and the Division of Responsibility, www.ellynsatterinstitute.org.

- Kids eat better if they are not pressured
- Kids eat unpredictably, waste food, and are leery of trying new foods
- Kids stop eating and drinking when they are full

As recommended by nutrition experts, supporting a philosophy that implements a *division of responsibility between adults and children* at mealtimes leads to a healthy eating environment.

- **Adults decide the *what, when and where* of feeding at school**
- **Children decide *whether they will choose to eat the foods offered and how much to eat.***

What Not to Say	What To Say
<p><i>Finish your milk</i></p> <p><i>You didn't eat enough of your lunch</i></p> <p>Phrases like this override a child’s ability to eat/drink to their own satiety. It is better for a child to stop eating/drinking when they are full rather than when all of the food/drink is gone.</p>	<p><i>Did you get enough to eat today?</i></p> <p><i>Is your tummy full?</i></p> <p><i>Are you finished with your lunch?</i></p> <p>Phrases like this help children recognize when they are full. Teach them to listen to their bodies feeling of hunger and fullness. It is best to stop eating when they are full.</p>
<p><i>You need to try one bite of that</i></p> <p><i>Please take a “No Thank You” bite for the cook</i></p> <p><i>You should try that, it tastes really good</i></p> <p>Phrases like this put pressure on children to eat and try new foods. Children will like foods less if they are coerced, bribed or forced to eat them.</p>	<p><i>I'd really love your opinion on the taste of this menu item, would you be willing to try it and tell me what you think?</i></p> <p><i>Our taste buds change over time, you might be surprised by liking it now even if you haven't enjoyed it in the past, would you like to taste a bite?</i></p> <p><i>If you're choosing not to taste it today, maybe you'd like to smell it. There are lots of different ways to get to know a good food.</i></p> <p>Phrases like this allow children the opportunity to choose which foods and how much to eat, creating a safe and open environment for trying new foods. It is a positive approach to offering a variety of foods.</p>
<p><i>Hurry, you only have five more minutes to finish your lunch!</i></p> <p>Putting time limits on eating can pressure children to eat too much too quickly and make mealtime a stressful and rushed environment.</p>	<p><i>You have five more minutes to enjoy your lunch.</i></p> <p><i>Fill up your tummy in the next five minutes.</i></p> <p>While time limits are necessary, you can make them positive. Please use time reminders such as calm, short phrases or playing music that can help children gauge the time left to eat.</p>