



NEWS RELEASE

By Anna Martin
Nutrition, Family and Consumer Sciences Advisor
UCCE San Joaquin County

April 2006

Encouraging a Child's Sense of Self Worth Through Feeding Styles

Before 3 years of age, a child's eating is driven by hunger. However, by the time children are 3, parental cues influence eating behaviors. Dr. Sheryl Hughes, a Children's Nutrition Research Center researcher, and her colleagues have developed an instrument to identify feeding styles.

One goal of parenting is to help children determine their own sense of self worth, recognizing that they can make wise decisions. This takes practice by the child and encouragement by the parents. Child-centered feeding practices such as reasoning, complimenting, and helping the child to eat promotes the child's sense of self worth. Parent-centered practices such as demands, threats, and reward contingencies do not.

The study identified feeding styles as child-centered and parent-centered. By looking at the examples below, you can determine whether your feeding style is more child-centered or parent-centered.

Child-centered feeding practices are when parents

- Say something positive about food
- Arrange the food to make it more interesting
- Ask questions about food
- Reason with the child to get him/ her to eat
- Allow the child to choose among appropriate foods
- Help children eat
- Compliment children

Parent-centered feeding practices are when parents

- Physically struggle with the child to get him/her to eat
- Warn the child that the food will be taken away if the child doesn't eat
- Promise the child something other than food if he/she eats
- Spoon-feed children
- Tell the child to eat a small amount of food
- Show disapproval of the child for not eating
- Suggest the child eats
- Tell the child to eat something on the plate
- Beg the child to eat

Remember as children get older and parents are less available, it is the child who will make decisions. Encourage those decision-making skills as soon as possible.

Source: Nutrition and Your Child Volume 2, 2005 www.kidsnutrition.org (USDA ARS Children's Nutrition Research Center)