

Touching Hearts Touching Minds Handout #21

Food fights (Picky eating)

Counseling Tool

What is the key message?

- Children will stop insisting on the same foods over and over if parents ignore their demands.

Who should receive this message?

- Parents whose child wants to eat only one food item meal after meal.

How can this message be used?

Open:

- Do you remember any foods that you wanted to eat all the time when you were little? What were they?
- Have any of your children insisted on the same food over and over? How does this make you feel?

Idea for a group:

- Let's start with the story of two moms. Both mothers face the same challenge but choose to handle it in different ways. Here is how Mother #1 handles a child who insists on eating only one food item meal after meal. The children in this story love peanut butter sandwiches and insist on eating them every meal for weeks.

Here is how Mother #1 handles the situation: (Read the following story.)

Story #1

Child: I want a peanut butter sandwich.

Mother: You had a peanut butter sandwich for breakfast today and for every meal yesterday. You're getting grilled cheese instead.

C: I want a peanut butter sandwich.

M: I said no. Didn't you hear me?

C: I want a peanut butter sandwich.

M: Eating the same food everyday for all three meals is not healthy. You need to eat the foods I give you.

C: I won't eat anything but a peanut butter sandwich.

M: Then you'll go straight to your room.

C: I won't eat anything else.



M: OK, I will give you a peanut butter sandwich. But you have to eat something different at dinner.

- How do you think this mom feels about her situation?
- What do you think will happen at the next meal with this mother and child? What should the mother have done differently?
- Now, let's see how a different mother handled the same situation. (Read the following story.)

Story #2

Child: I want a peanut butter sandwich.

Mother: I know you love peanut butter, but doesn't this look good? I made this yummy grilled cheese sandwich...and I have these delicious apple slices.

C: I want a peanut butter sandwich.

M: I'll put your grilled cheese sandwich and apples here. I bet the apple slices would taste great dipped in peanut butter.

C: I want a peanut butter sandwich.

M: Why don't you try what you have on your plate? If you don't like it, you don't have to finish it.

C: I want a peanut butter sandwich.

M: (Ignores demand.)

C: I want a peanut butter sandwich.

M: Sister Sally, you seem to really like those apple slices. Does the grilled cheese taste good?

C: I want a peanut butter sandwich.

M: Let's go to the park and play in a little while. I'll let you climb the slide by yourself today.

- How do you think this mom feels about her situation?
- What did Mother #2 do differently to handle the same situation? How do you feel about how she handled this situation?
- Which child will likely be willing to try a different food at the next meal? Why?

Sample responses:

- Behaviors that get attention continue.
- Behaviors that are ignored stop.
- Positive attention to the desired behavior helps end the negative behaviors.
- Mother acknowledges and praises sister for trying new foods.
- The child was trying to show his independence and the mother provided another way of being independent. (Allowing the child to climb the slide by himself at the park.)



Dig:

- What are some of the ways you've tried to deal with your child's picky eating?
- What are a parent's responsibilities when faced with a picky eater?
- Will children really starve if you don't give into their demands for the same food meal after meal?
- What are some ways that parents can get children to try new foods?

Sample responses:

- Encourage, but don't force, kids to try new foods
- Offer new foods alongside favorite foods
- Offer a small amount of each food on the plate
- Keep trying...children's preferences change over time
- What may happen when parents ignore a problem behavior—like demanding the same food over and over? **Sample responses:**
 - The behavior may get worse before it gets better. The child is accustomed to getting attention for the behavior and may temporarily increase it before eventually decreasing it.
 - Eventually, the behavior goes away when attention to it ceases.

Connect:

- Why do children ask for the same foods over and over?
- Why is it a good idea to not make a big deal out of picky eating?
- Children little control over their lives. The food they eat may be one thing that they can control. What can you do to allow a child to have a part in deciding what to eat?
- How will you feel when your child tries a new food that you've been offering for a while? And likes it?

Act:

- What behaviors will you ignore this week?
- What behaviors will you give positive attention?
- What is one thing you'll try this week to introduce a new food to your child?

