

How do we support healthy relationships with food?

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In my role as consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start, I offer information for families and the community. As an extension to previous articles, “Matching our Food Choices to Support our Unique Health Needs” and “Autistic Food Identity”, I want to explore further how we might support children to develop healthy relationships with food while including them at the center of the discovery process.

When matching our food choices to support our unique health needs, we are encouraged to look beyond the how we feel immediately, to how our bodies respond over time, especially when it comes to blood sugar swings - including hypoglycemia and diabetes, low energy, body pain, allergies, celiac and other autoimmune conditions. When we honor our unique needs with our choices, our body’s often respond well.

The broader question for this focus is aimed at “developing children”. How do we support healthy relationships with food, starting at a young age, as a foundation to support them for the rest of their lives? We don’t all have the same needs, and we don’t all have the same experiences. In the case of developing children, they are learning about their needs, while having experiences.

They are not always able to communicate in ways that adults can fully

understand and interpret. As we look more deeply at the experiences of children, it can be difficult to know how to support this process, while also holding the big picture.

One of the most important roles, for parents/caregivers, is to help children learn from their experiences, in order to grow into adults who can make good choices. One part in this process is to help children identify and communicate their own needs.

It is also essential for adults to pay attention and take this communication with children seriously. Without this engagement, it is difficult to make the connection between their experience and their own unique internal needs. Children need to learn from their choices. This includes the need to learn from a range of choices, including the poor ones, to learn what happens when their bodies provide feedback.

Learning can happen with every choice, if the parent/caregiver is attuned to the delicate and tricky balance of guidance based on what we believe is best and the exploration of becoming informed by the wisdom of the body. Curiosity and communication are essential to this developmental learning.

I would boldly say that in the overall picture, every one of us would benefit from connecting and attuning to our own personal body wisdom. It might be possible that children are

much better at this than we realize. However, in today’s world there are many pressures and distractions that keep our focus away from our body’s messages/clues. Furthermore, many adults were trained as children to do what they are told, and this often requires us to ignore our bodily needs. Problems often arise when we ignore our needs, including physical illness, emotional and behavioral struggles.

When children refuse to eat certain foods, they are often punished. Many of us learned to suppress our needs in order to avoid punishment. Eventually, we lose our connection with what our body is communicating to us through symptoms.

When we support our children to trust their body’s needs, validation is necessary. It is difficult to trust our body when others around us question or shame us. I believe that children can learn what works best for them, if they are free to make their own food choices, and if care providers can be curious about their experiences to help children make the connection. When children’s bodily experiences and needs are honored, a healthy relationship with food is the likely result, which ultimately achieves nourishment and nurture.

I don’t have specific answers for the readers, because the answers lie within each relationship configuration and in the direct experiences of each individual child.

What I can share, is that when children appear to be picky, demanding, or single focused on what they will and will not eat, this is generally downstream of where needs were previously unmet. The responses are likely reactions to the mismatch of internal needs and external requirements.

How can we tap into the information held in our children’s bodies? If we listen to our children with curiosity, learning is possible. Is the rejection of a food due to something about texture or flavor? Does it make their skin feel itchy? Is it loud? Does it squeak, and hurt their ears? Does it feel fuzzy in their throat? Does it make them gag?

Through these discussions of eating experiences, we have potential to learn about what works and doesn’t work. Ideally, we can then match our food choices to support our unique needs. In this case, the questions focused on sensory needs, which are part of health. Adults might have some unlearning to do as they begin to see where they may have disconnected to their internal body wisdom.

Please know that Siletz Tribal Head Start offers support for nutritional consultation at no cost to Head Start families. If you have concerns about your child’s nutrition or family nutrition concerns, please contact your teacher or the director and ask to speak to the nutritionist. We want to support your children and families.

Siletz Tribe shows support to vets

Veteran gift boxes were mailed out once again this year. It is our honor to provide this small token of appreciation for your service, and we are grateful to Tribal Council for the opportunity to continue this meaningful tradition.

If you are a veteran and do not receive a box, please contact Buster Lane at 541-444-8330 so we can ensure you are receiving all services offered, and to be included in future events.





Domestic violence is not a Native American tradition.

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- Call you names or criticize you?
- Isolate you from family or friends?
- Threaten to hurt you or your children?
- Push, slap, kick or strangle you?
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