

## #146 - Feeding Picky Kids

Hi there! Welcome to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't! Today is episode 146 - Feeding Picky Kids. And more specifically, how to nurture kids who trust their bodies. We talked a few weeks ago about intuitive eating, and a lot of you asked how to do this with kids. I am definitely not an expert and still very much learning how to do this with my own kids, but we're going to talk through some easy, actionable approaches you can start today.

First, a quick announcement. I wanted to give you a heads up on a possible change here on the podcast. Up until this point, in the first 146 episodes, I haven't had ads on the show. The first reason was because this audience was really small when I started, like most podcasts that aren't named Serial, so it was never really an issue. Now, the show is almost four years old, and y'all we have well over four million downloads total. Four million! More than four million because the entire first 18 months of the show had no stats attached to them because I'm very professional. Anyway, the show is growing, the business is growing, and so ads will be part of the show in the near future.

One of the reasons I hesitated to explore ads was because I worried what people would think. Two years ago, someone sent me an email that thanked me for not having ads because it made my show feel more real. While I can understand the sentiment behind that message, I also want to say that podcasting is really hard work and that having ads is a really sensible way to support a business. Y'all are smart, fantastic people. You know that creating stuff takes a lot of time and energy, and all of us are worth getting paid for those things. Sadly, some of us don't - like stay at home parents - and some of us do get a paycheck but it's not reflective of the value of the work, like teachers, social workers, and counselors. So there's this weird thing when you're responsible for your own paycheck because you're the boss... which I am. I am my own boss. I have an employee. I pay taxes and hired an accountant for the first time to do that this year you guys why did I wait so long. If I don't decide how I'm going to make money, I don't make any money. Which is weird, right? So far, I've earned an income in a variety of ways, and it looks like adding podcast ads will be one of those ways pretty soon. It just makes sense. There are still some details to work out, but I just wanted to give you a heads up that those are coming.

Again, you're very smart people. You know the differences in an ad, being an affiliate or partner with someone, and just sharing something I love. I share what I love in my Latest Lazy Letter and sometimes on Instagram. I am only an affiliate for programs and people that I've used and vouch for. And while ads are technically being paid by a company to say words about their company, I am committed to choosing advertisers that make sense for you. While I won't have personal experience with every product or company, I do know you and want to continue to bring joy and help to your lives, so my choices for advertisers will reflect that as best I can. And we'll get some fun ad music to mark those, so that's all fun. Jingles are always fun. So that's the announcement! Ads are coming. No big thing. Cool cool cool.

Okay, let's talk about our picky children. What's the problem with picky kids? It's frustrating to make food that doesn't get eaten. Very frustrating. But I think more than that, we worry that our kids aren't getting the nutrients they need. We also worry that they'll only eat brown and red foods for the rest of their lives. Honestly, when it comes to picky kids, we have a lot of fear.

I catch myself wanting to justify my kids' eating, even to you guys on Instagram or here on the podcast. Kind of like, yeah they don't like green foods but we give them vitamins so it's okay. That kind of thing. Frankly, neither of us needs to justify how our kids eat to each other or anyone else. There's a lot of shame around how kids eat, and that needs to stop. If other kids eat stuff that your kid would only eat in your dreams, you feel like a terrible irresponsible parent, and nobody wants that energy in their lives. It's the actual worst to feel like the actual worst.

So we have a lot of fear about what our kids eat. We also exert a lot of control over how our kids eat. Three more bites before you get up, eat your vegetables first, no dessert until after dinner, you just ate how can you be hungry again, you'll spoil your dinner, that kind of thing. P.S. I've said or done every single one of those things, one yesterday. I am very much in the learning stages of this, too.

So we're afraid of what our kids eat, what they don't eat, how much they eat, if they're getting enough to eat in order to grow, when they eat, all the things. There's a lot of pressure on us and them.

This is why I've been moving into the space of intuitive eating for my kids, not just for me. I think kids are picky because kids are picky. People are picky. We like different things. And when you add to that the food rules and pressures our kids feel but don't really have words for, of course they're going to hoard and hold tight to foods that are more or less off limits. So today in the spirit of small steps and grace wherever you are, let's look at ten ways to start down the road of letting your kids be intuitive eaters and trusting their bodies.

### **1. Your kids were born intuitive eaters.**

If you think about babies, babies cry when they're hungry and stop when they're done. They'll go several hours without eating and then cluster feed like animals the next day. We were born with signals for hunger and fullness, and your kids are included in that. Don't forget that for them or yourself. This is how we were made to eat - listening to our body's physical and mental queues.

### **2. Respect your kids' signals of hungry and full.**

This is tough because we're so used to eating a certain amount before we're allowed to leave the table or before our kids are allowed to leave the table. We also can't believe a kid when they're still hungry, even after just eating something. Intuitive eating experts, and the ones that I've learned from are all registered dietitians and professionals and such, say that there might be a dip for a bit in your kid's habits as they trust you to believe that you trust them. Sure,

they're going to say they're full when they don't want the food that's offered to them, and that's okay. You don't have to figure out every single motivation in why they say what they say. But begin to trust them. The more we can trust the "I'm full" and the "I'm still hungry," the more they can too. They're on a learning curve in this, so be patient.

### **3. Make all foods equal.**

We need to take morality off of food. No foods are bad for you or good for you. We'll talk about different language in a second, but it's really important to make all foods equal. Zero morality. They need to learn, just like we do for ourselves, to trust our bodies more than we trust a label. That's not saying labels are bad; they're just not the most important thing in intuitive eating. Otherwise, you're back to food rules and letting labels and diet culture tell you what to eat.

One way to make all foods equal is to not save dessert for the end, especially if you hold it hostage and make it even more enticing. I know that's a typical pattern and hard to break, but try serving all the foods at the same time. Put a cookie on the plate along with whatever dinner you made. That's why I love snack platters. Many afternoons, I put a bunch of different foods on a platter for the kids to share after school. There are no rules on eating certain foods before others, and they see all the stuff on a plate in equal amounts in a circle. It's like King Arthur's round table; there's no food that's more important or better than another. So think about ways you can make all foods equal.

### **4. Make food as a reward an option, not the rule.**

Seeing food as a reward isn't by nature bad. Food can be really fun and celebratory for sure. A way to keep all foods equal is by not automatically making food a reward or the thing you do to celebrate something. Instead of saying "let's go get ice cream to celebrate!" you might ask the kid "how would you like to celebrate?" If the kid wants to go get ice cream, by all means do it. But by giving options of fun things, you make food one fun thing without putting so much pressure on it as a reward. And if you're allowing your kids to eat without food rules and trust themselves more, they won't see ice cream as some unique thing they never get. The ice cream isn't really what's special; it's the experience around it. Ice cream is almost neutral. So make food as a reward an option but not the rule.

### **5. Avoid food rules.**

This is likely the hardest thing I'll say today because it feels so counter-intuitive. And it actually is. Food rules are counter-intuitive. They are counter to our intuition. The same is true for our kids. And we give kids a lot of food rules. They have to eat certain foods first, other foods are relegated to certain times of the day, they can't eat dessert until they've eaten a certain number of bites, candy only once a day if that, all of that stuff. There are so many food rules for kids, and our intentions for that are good I think. We want them to develop good habits, to grow strong, to try new things, to not waste food, all of it. But there's a lot of evidence that shows that kids who

live in a house with a lot of food rules develop disordered eating or a shameful relationship with food as teenagers and adults. Just like we did. That episode a few weeks ago about food rules hit you guys hard because we all live with so many food rules and don't realize how they strip the joy from eating and strip us from knowing and trusting our bodies better. The same is true of our kids. So even though it's hard for you and for me too, we could serve our kids well by not making them live with food rules.

## **6. Talk about growing foods.**

This is a point that can be really helpful in communicating with your kids about food. We often hear foods described as healthy or junk and even good or bad. I've heard myself say things like "well, sugar is kind of bad for our bodies, so let's not have that lollipop right now." I'm not saying that certain foods don't offer a bigger nutritional punch than others. Of course they do. But that doesn't mean that less nutrient dense food is bad. Our bodies are really good at knowing the difference and telling us what they need to function well. Good language to have around food, especially with kids, is growing food. If you need some language, especially when your kid comes home from school after a unit on nutrition and tells you that your house has too many unhealthy foods and you need to get rid of them all (true story for me by the way), it's nice to have words that affirm the idea of nutrition without putting morality on the situation. So yeah, certain foods are growing foods. They're full of more things that help our bodies grow. But some bodies need different kinds of growing foods than others, too. We all need different foods to grow. That's why it's important to listen to our own bodies about what they might need, how hungry they are, how full they are, how tired they are, all of that. Growing foods are a middle ground between food morality language and just not knowing what to say at all.

## **7. Name the difference between your way at home and the way everywhere else.**

That growing food piece is helpful here, but it's also nice to have some thoughts stored away when you have a kid confused by what they hear at school or at grandma's or at a friend's house. My son once told me that a girl in his class who he often sat next to at lunch kept telling him that his lunches weren't healthy and that he wasn't going to get big and strong. Bless him it scared him so much. It was helpful to have kind language around the way we are at home and the way others might be in other families and environments. In some houses, the bedtime is at 7pm and in others it's 9pm. In some houses, you take your shoes off when you come in the door. Every house gets to decide its own way of doing things, so encouraging your kid that no one house is doing it right or wrong but just different could be helpful. We often say at our house that we think all foods are fine. No foods are bad, and you're not bad for eating one thing instead of something else. Again, we're still in the early stages of trying to create this culture in our home, but being aware of the difference in messages my kids get at home versus other places is a helpful awareness. We also don't want to demonize people who do live with food rules or who eat "healthy." That's not fair either. There's more than one way, and this is our way.

## **8. You are not responsible for what your child eats.**

Let me say that again: you are not responsible for what your child eats. Let me share this quote from a registered dietician and expert in kids and intuitive eating. "The greatest challenge parents must overcome is not holding themselves responsible for what the child eats. They are only responsible for meal timing, serving a variety of foods with at least one choice they know the child will enjoy, and ensuring the meal time is pleasant." So you just have your meal and snack times give or take, you serve the food, and you stay pleasant. Not having any food rules definitely helps this situation. And remember that your kids aren't choosing whatever they want to eat from the entire kitchen; they're choosing from what you serve, and you're offering at least one thing that's familiar that they do like. Otherwise, it's all their choice and not your responsibility. Another RDN says, "The number one change parents can make when feeding their children is not saying anything. Once the food is in front of the child, it is no longer the parent or anyone else's business how much or whether the child eats." I mean. That sounds nice in practice, doesn't it? No more fighting over bites and new foods and all of that at the table. But it also sounds kind of impossible and borderline irresponsible. I get that. My husband and I talked last weekend about this, and this part was a huge sticking point, especially for him. But remember this is a process. This isn't an on-off switch that will immediately change. We're all still finding our way, mostly because we're steeped pretty deeply in our own food rules and we don't trust our bodies, so it's hard to let our kids trust theirs.

Which leads me to...

## **9. Let kids learn the responsibility to their own bodies.**

They are responsible for themselves. What an incredible gift we can give our kids to give them agency over their own bodies, even as young kids just with food. As they develop the awareness - actually, they already have awareness but have likely lost a good bit of it - they will trust themselves. They will trust their bodies. And that kind of responsibility goes beyond just what they eat. It affects how they listen to rest cues and energy cues, how they interact with people and trust their own voice in the room. Creating a culture around intuitive eating for our kids who are already born equipped to do this creates a culture where they trust themselves and feel confident in who they are. That's such a far-reaching, far-lasting consequence of something as simple as what they eat for dinner. It sounds simplistic, but it's all connected.

## **10. You're going to mess up, and that's okay.**

Right now, the biggest mess up we have in our house is that my husband and I aren't on the same page. Not because we fundamentally disagree about this but because we've never really talked about it. He's lived a life of food rules just like I have, and he's a guy which often manifests differently in our culture than it does for females. We also have ideas of what it means to be a good parent. Doesn't a good parent not let a kid eat dessert unless they finish their dinner or not let their kid eat chips every day or say "You haven't eaten in six hours you're going to be hungry tomorrow if you don't eat your dinner go eat your dinner" and then do a little shaming "I told you so" in the morning when the kid is starving so they'll learn the lesson to eat

when it's dinner time? All of that is normal and regular and we all do it. But because Kaz and I haven't talked about this much together on purpose, we don't have a unified front which means we're constantly sending our kids mixed signals. They get mixed signals from me because I'm still trying to figure out whether or not I'm comfortable with my ten year old eating an entire bag of chips because he's obsessed with chips. But why is he obsessed with chips? I think one reason is because chips are delicious. Another is because I've made chips more off limits, which to him makes more enticing. So there are mixed messages, and that's okay. We're figuring it out. Like I said, Kaz and I talked about this over the weekend, and while we're starting to get on the same page, we're also still trying to find the page in the first place. It's confusing and a little strange to do this with kids, but I've also seen the incredible benefits in my own life of living without food rules and not putting so much emphasis on the importance of the shape of my physical body, and I want my kids to experience that, too. But it's hard, and there are lots of ways to mess up every single day. Just remember that it's okay. Parents mess up. We make the wrong call. We're inconsistent. All of it. Don't shame yourself for it. It's a process for everyone, and the sooner you accept that you'll mess up, the quicker you can move past it, learn from it, and just keep going.

So that's our first dive into transforming picky eaters into intuitive eaters. Again, I'm not an expert or even super great at doing this at all. But I'm slowly seeing the benefits of letting my kids have agency over themselves, trusting their bodies, and learning a new language around food. Just take it slow.

Okay, that's it for today. We can talk about this more this Thursday on Instagram. I know y'all will have a lot of questions and concerns, and while I will do my best to answer what I can, also know that you know your family better than I do. It's okay to try something and it not work. Try something else. Be patient. Start small. But come ask your questions, and we can encourage each other. Thursday morning, I'll put a panel up in stories where you can ask your questions, and then I'll go live around noon eastern to talk through this a bit. Most of my lives last about half an hour, they exist in my stories for 24 hours, and then after that, they're saved to IGTV. You can follow me @thelazygenius to access all of that.

Thanks so much for listening, everyone! Until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week.