

APPENDIX F

TREATMENT OF FEEDING/GROWTH PROBLEMS

Satter EM. Appendix F, Treatment of Feeding/Growth Problems. *Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming*. Madison, WI: Kelcy Press; 2005

For parents of children with long-standing eating problems, making fundamental changes requires a leap of faith and steady nerves. The child will most likely eat a considerable amount before he rediscovers his internal regulators of hunger, appetite, and satiety. During the transition, parents have to resist the urge to compensate for their child's eating extremes and instead must continue to maintain Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility in Feeding. Holding steady with respect to feeding in the presence of the child's eating extremes assures the child that his parents truly will feed him as much as he wants to eat. Then he will regain his sensitivity to his internal regulators of hunger, appetite, and satiety, and his eating will moderate.

To initiate and persist with such fundamental change, parents have to be fully satisfied that all issues have been considered and that they are doing the right thing. Giving them—and yourself—that reassurance requires the thorough assessment described in appendix E, "Assessment of Feeding/Growth Problems."

Ten follow-up sessions are generally enough to help parents and children through the transition. Parents need weekly follow-up for 6 or 7 weeks until they establish positive feeding. Within that time their

child will have had time to show clear evidence of food regulation. After that, the task is consolidating change. Then biweekly sessions, and toward the end, even monthly sessions are adequate. Parents must give careful attention to the detail of the treatment plan for at least 3 months before the child accepts that the change is there to stay and truly develops new patterns. However, parents can't revert to the old ways of feeding or the child will revert to the old eating problems.

The Treatment Plan

The details of the treatment plan, of course, vary depending on the details of the assessment. However, figure F.1 lists the fundamental features of every treatment plan.

Doing Follow-up

In follow-up, I support parents in sorting out and maintaining the division of responsibility in feeding, help them detect and eliminate their patterns of food restriction, help them find ways to reassure to their child that he will be fed, and help them detect evidence of their child's internal regulation.

Sort Out the Division of Responsibility in Feeding Here are some typical questions that arise in follow-up.

- **Isn't it controlling to be so rigid about meal and snack times?**
No, it is taking responsibility for what is yours. Your child needs the structure and still has lots of room for choices.
- **Isn't it restrained feeding to not let a child eat between times?**
No, he isn't being deprived. He has plenty of opportunity to get as much as he wants at regular eating times.
- **How much bread should we put on the table?** *A lot.*
- **Is it all right if our child eats that much bread?** Yes. He will tire of it and eventually eat something else.
- **Shouldn't the child be eating his vegetables?** He will eat vegetables when he is ready. In the meantime, keep including them in meals and enjoying them yourself.
- **Is it restrained feeding if we don't have enough strawberries to let everyone eat their fill?** No, as long as there is something else to fill up on.
- **Is it really all right to let him fill up on cookies at snack time?**
Yes. At first he will eat a lot, but after the newness wears off he will be satisfied with fewer cookies.

FIGURE F.1 TREATMENT PLAN: THE PARENTS' TASKS AND THE CHILD'S

The Parents' Tasks

- Restore the stage-appropriate division of responsibility in feeding.
- Provide regular and predictable meals and sit-down snacks.
- Make mealtime and snack time pleasant by eating and being companionable with the child.
- Plan menus with a variety of appealing food; don't exclude high-calorie food.
- Let the child eat much or little or nothing at all from what parents provide.
- At every regular eating time, give the child strong permission to eat what and how much he wants from what parents provide.
- Provide rewarding and filling food for snacks, including "forbidden" food.
- Don't allow grazing for food or beverages (except water) between times.
- With the child older than about age 10, provide treatment to help him to recover his sensitivity to his internal regulators of hunger, appetite, and satiety.
- Limit television watching to one or two hours daily.
- Help the child find ways to enjoy moving his body, experiencing himself as physically capable.
- Let his weight do what it will based on positive parenting and feeding.

The Child's Tasks

Starting at age 8 to 10 years, the child has jobs as well. Here is a typical list of those jobs:

- Do your eating at mealtime and snack time.
- Pick and choose from the foods your parents offer you for meals and snacks.
- Go to the table hungry and eat until you are satisfied.
- Pay attention while you eat.
- Be good company at the table.
- Ask your parents to include the "forbidden" food you like.
- Sneak up on new food and learn to like it.
- Point out to your parents—politely—when they are taking over your jobs with eating.

Detect Tendencies to Restrict Food Intake Parents' tendencies to restrict food intake are so deeply ingrained, automatic, and culturally reinforced that it can be surprising and even discouraging for parents to detect and get rid of those tendencies. If the child continues to be food-preoccupied or periodically disinhibits, parents are restricting in some way, perhaps without realizing it. Identifying and discontinuing that restriction is absolutely essential or treatment will fail.

- **Is it all right to run out of our child's favorite food so he will eat something else?** No. Deliberately running out of his favorite food is manipulative, and your child will catch on and not trust you.
- **Is it all right to use low-calorie salad dressing and margarine?** No. Your child depends on your including high-fat food with meals in order to eat the calories he needs and get pleasure and satisfaction from his meals. Using low-fat foods to get your child to eat fewer calories is restrained feeding.
- **He forgot his snack. Shall I just let it go?** You have to be the one to remember the snack. Remind him: "It is time for snack. If you don't have it now, you will have to wait for dinner."
- **He eats so fast. He guards his plate and just wolfs his food down. Shouldn't I make him slow down?** Once he learns to trust you to give him as much as he wants and not to be critical, he will slow down and stop guarding his plate.
- **Is it all right to just give him fruit for snack? Otherwise, he won't eat his dinner.** He needs something more substantial than fruit. Move snack time earlier so he has time to get hungry for dinner.
- **What about a bedtime snack? It seems like he shouldn't have that if he doesn't eat his dinner! Using snacks to put leverage on meals makes your child overeat. He isn't trying to get around you—he does the best he can with his dinner. Young children especially find grown-up dinnertime food challenging. They are tired, and they have been eating all day. Have your dessert at dinner; then have the bedtime snack be good but unexciting—cereal and milk, cheese, crackers, and juice. Then trust your child to do well with his eating.**

Reassure the Child He Will Be Fed Finding ways to reassure the child that he will be fed—and *really meaning it*—speeds the child's process of learning to trust and therefore being able to detect his internal regulators. In order to stop eating when he is comfortably full but not stuffed, he has to be sure that another meal or snack is coming

soon and he can again have as much as he wants to eat. How can parents provide that reassurance?

- Put the food on the table in serving bowls so the child can help himself.
- Make sure there is *plenty* of food. Leftovers provide reassurance that everyone has had enough to eat.
- Offer more food, but don't urge or insist.
- Be prompt and matter-of-fact about giving second and third helpings, even if he seems to eat *a lot*.
- Don't worry at first about wasting food. After your child is fully reassured that he will get enough to eat, he can learn ways to cut down on waste. Remember, however, that food waste is an inevitable part of feeding children.
- When in doubt, ask yourself, "What would I do if I weren't worried about his weight?" If you would do it in parenting a "normal" child, it is likely to be okay.

Detect the Child's Internal Regulation Finally, parents depend on follow-up to help them detect evidence of their child's internal regulation. An early sign of internal regulation might be that a child leaves a little food on his plate or forgets about snack time. Rather than celebrating leftover food and skipping the snack, the parent can reassure the child by saying "Are you sure you have had enough? That's it until snack time," or "It's time for your snack." In a backward sort of way, being firm about structured eating times reassures the child that his hunger is not the fearsome thing it once was. He can tolerate his hunger because he can count on being filled up at the next meal or snack. A child might show evidence of internal regulation by not finishing his food and then reassure himself that he will be fed by asking to save something for a snack.

Together or Apart?

The age of the child determines the structure of treatment sessions—whether you treat parents alone, parents and children together, or parents and children separately.

Children Up to Age 10 Years For children up to about 10 years of age, treatment goes best with parents alone. With younger children, parents have enough control of the child's eating environment that they can turn the situation around on behalf of the child. Once positive feeding is restored, children evolve sensitivity to their internal regula-

tors on their own.

Children Age 10 to 12 Years For the child from roughly 10 to 12 years old, it works best to have sessions with both parents and children together. These older children have more autonomy and are learning to manage some food selection and schedule keeping on their own. They benefit from the discussions in the sessions.

In addition, parents and children can be helpful to each other in sorting out the boundaries of the division of responsibility and arriving at reasonable rules and expectations. Of course, parents must remember that while school-age children can be good collaborators in working out rules, it is up to parents to enforce them. Children still try to get around even their own rules. Parents must also remember their own authority—they don't have to stand over their child to enforce the rules. The school-age child is on his own for lunch and after-school snack. It is legitimate for parents to expect him to use the lunch money they provide for the regular school lunch menu, not the a la carte menu, and to have a get-your-snack-by-this-time rule.

Adolescents Since adolescents are working on autonomy, and since parents are working on playing a supportive role, parents and adolescents benefit from having separate sessions, with the occasional session together. The focus of parents' sessions is essentially what I detailed earlier: Sort out the division of responsibility in feeding, detect tendencies to restrict food intake, find ways to reassure the child he will be fed, and learn to detect evidence of the child's internal regulation. If parents lack eating competence, they also benefit from recovering their internal regulators.

The focus of the child's sessions is recovering eating competence, initially around internal regulation of food intake. While the child's food acceptance may also be severely impaired, focusing on that too soon turns the intervention into a diet rather than an initiative toward eating competence. Individual sessions help the adolescent tune in on hunger, appetite, and satisfaction. To support their internal regulators, adolescents can learn to take responsibility for timing and food selection to provide themselves with structured and rewarding eating times throughout the day. They can also learn to depend on parents to provide them with a reliable evening meal.

Negotiating the timing, content and process of afternoon snacks and the evening meal demands joint sessions. Children and parents differ on when and what to eat, emotional climate, and who gets to say what shall and shall not happen. All of those issues can and must be sorted out in order to preserve the family meal.