



Children's Eating Is In Crisis

Six-year-old Peter's food selectivity is so extreme that he may have to be tube fed. His eating troubles began when he was six months old and refused to eat solid food. Since then, it has been a series of food struggles until today he warily eats from a short and ever-shrinking list of name-brand foods and his parents worry constantly about his very survival. Four-year-old Toni has always been big, her weight is going up devastatingly fast, and she can't get her mind off food. From infancy she has loved to eat. Her parents try to restrict her, but she gulps down as much as she can, whenever she can, especially of sweets and chips. Her parents are weary of the struggle, but they are afraid to lighten up for fear Toni will gain even more weight. Does Peter have some inborn disorder that keeps him from eating? Is Toni missing a stopping place?

Ellyn Satter's Child of Mine: Nurturing a Confident and Joyful Eater says today's children are being framed. Rather than being unable to eat or prone to overeating and weight gain, they are reacting to the way they are being fed. Consider the back stories. Peter's parents didn't realize that a child might flatly reject solid food, be enthusiastic, or be somewhere in between—but that they could trust him to get around to eating. Instead, they pressured him to eat, and he reacted by resisting eating, then and now. Toni's parents didn't realize that children know how much to eat and that they grow in the way that is right for them even if they love to eat and are relatively large. They restricted her, she became terrified of going hungry, and she continually begged for food, then and now.

Parents can trust their child to eat when they follow the Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding (sDOR): They do the *what*, *when*, and *where* of *feeding* and let their child do the *whether* and *how much* of *eating*. Parents who follow sDOR give their child repeated neutral exposure to food and the child learns at their own pace to eat the food parents eat. Parents who follow sDOR reassure even enthusiastically eating children that they won't have to go hungry, and the child eats as much or as little as they need. It isn't too late for Peter and Toni's parents to follow sDOR. At first, the children's eating is likely to become more extreme. That won't last. After a few weeks, they will eat the same as other children their age: a lot sometimes, not much other times, a full meal sometimes, one or two foods another—and both they and their parents will enjoy family meals.

Ellyn Satter's Child of Mine: Nurturing a Confident and Joyful Eater outlines a radical and transformative proposal to stop imposing agendas on children's eating and growth and simply trust them. Satter bases her recommendations on extensive clinical experience and a sound analysis of research on child nutrition and eating behavior, food parenting practices, and population health.

Ellyn Satter, MS, MSSW, is a dietitian, family Therapist, and internationally recognized authority on eating and feeding. She is also the author of *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family*, *Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming*, *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*, and *How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much*. Satter has three children and seven grandchildren and lives and works in Madison, Wisconsin.