
LESSON B

Relationships and Food and Nutrition

FOCUS: Food is frequently used to promote friendliness and create a social atmosphere. The "ritual of hospitality" is generally learned in the family. Experts generally agree the family has the greatest influence on food patterns, but as teens spend more time away from home, parental influences decline. Food choices may also reflect relationships with peers, influence from the media, school etc. In addition food serves as a sensitive barometer of emotional state. If there is a problem in a relationship a response to food may be an early indicator.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Before students come into class place bowls of popcorn with napkins throughout the room. (Groupings of about 4-6 generally work well.) Simply instruct the students that the popcorn is there for them to eat. Observe their behavior. If possible allow some time before beginning class or give a group assignment. Begin class by discussing how the presence of food effected the behavior of the students and feeling in the classroom.
2. Use Teacher Information, "Food Promotes Sociability." Have students pair up with someone sitting close by them. Ask them to respond to the following questions/situations.

Think of an experience you've had when food has conveyed friendliness, social warmth or acceptance. Share your experiences. What is similar, what is different?

What "rituals of hospitality" have you learned in your family?

How are your food habits influenced by mass media? Relationships with your friends? Your desire to be more independent?
3. Share the story found on teacher information "Food and Emotions" with your students. Use Teacher Information, "Food Preparation and Relationships."
4. To evaluate the impact relationships might have on eating habits have students complete the worksheet "Check Out Your Eating Habits" and then mark the ones that are influenced by their relationships. Discuss as a class.

"Food Promotes Sociability"

Have you ever stopped to consider the effect of food decisions on your relationships with others? Food is often used to promote friendliness and social warmth—interpersonal acceptance.

Of all group influences on food patterns, the family exerts the greatest effect. The "ritual of hospitality" is learned in the family. Examples include taking a person's coat when they come to the door, or offering them a cool drink.

As teens spend more time away from home, parental influence declines. Food choices may reflect influence of mass media and peers. It may also reflect a push for independence. How are your food habits influenced by mass media? How are your food habits influenced by your desire for more independence?

Have you ever stopped to consider the effect of food decisions on your relationships with others? What are they?

Psychological consequences

Emotional consequences

Social consequences

"Food and Emotions"

Food is a sensitive barometer of emotional state. Food habits may be an indicator of relationships with problems. We can compare this to an iceberg. Our food habits are the tip of the iceberg we can see above water. Yet, there may be problems in much larger proportion hidden from view. If this is so, we find ourselves only looking at the symptoms, not the real problem. Consider the following story:

A young asthmatic patient who was growing poorly appeared to be reacting to enormous parental pressure on his eating. The parents seemed unable to decrease their control and preoccupation with his eating, even though they were coached in appropriate approaches to feeding and encouraged to adopt a more relaxed attitude. On further examination, it emerged that the mother was working at a job she disliked to pay for the father's chronically failing business attempts. The parents worked different shifts and rarely saw each other. The father was gone every weekend to compete in costly sporting events. Despite all evidence to the contrary, the mother insisted that their relationship was good and that they were cooperating well in raising the children. She was unwilling to confront the situation with her husband and attempt to resolve it. Meanwhile, she was displacing her anxiety onto her son.

When has food "said" something about you and a relationship with someone else?

Food can become an emotional safety valve. Teens leaving home for school, etc., are often vocal about "awful food." For the first time their own pet likes and dislikes are not being catered to—a painful but maturing experience. To complain of homesickness or other things that really bother would appear childish and immature, but to criticize the food seems sophisticated. Thus, the individual who feels caught in a disagreeable situation that can't be avoided may use the device of complaining about food as an emotional safety valve.

What is the value of understanding that food can be an emotional safety valve?

What are other ways we use food as a safety valve?

How do your experiences with food shape your expectations? How do these expectations influence relationships with others.

"Food Preparation and Relationships"

We often equate love for family through food preparation. Mothers often prepare an especially delicious dish, serve a meal of a meaningful pattern, or have an appropriate food for a special occasion, and deep meanings thereby come to be attached to it. For instance, a special birthday cake is made, fruits or vegetables are served or prepared a certain way, or the family develops a habit of eating a special breakfast on holidays. Families may come to expect a particular food on special occasions and deep meanings thereby come to be attached to it. Thus, the love of the mother is associated with certain foods, and there are often lifetime favorites in spite of the son or daughter leaving the parental home.

How do your experiences with food shape your expectations?

How do these expectations influence relationships with others?

How do the following situations affect family relationships from your own experience?

Eating at a fast food restaurant

Eating supper together as a family

Eating as a family in front of the TV

Eating on the run, every member for him/herself

Check Out Your Eating Habits

Name _____

Directions: Read each statement below and place a check in one of the columns.

1. I eat in a lot of different rooms in the house.
2. I eat while standing up rather than sitting down.
3. I eat my food quickly.
4. I eat snacks throughout the day.
5. I eat a lot of foods high in sugar, fat and salt.
6. I do not drink water while I'm eating meals.
7. I eat while watching TV and/or studying.
8. I eat when I feel upset or low.
9. I skip meals.
10. I put large portions of food on my plate.
11. I eat while on the run.
12. I eat junk foods late at night.
13. I eat out a lot instead of eating with my family or room-mates.

Follow up questions:

1. Am I satisfied with my eating habits? Why or why not?
2. Is there an eating habit that I would like to change? What would that be and in what way?
3. Are any of my habits effected by my relationships?
If yes, list.
4. Are my habits effected positively or negatively by others.
5. How might planning and eating meals as a household avoid bad habits?
6. How would I have to change my relationship to change my habit?

Adapted from the Colorado Core Curriculum, "Life Management" Colorado State University