

Easing into food safety guidelines with your child

It can be difficult for your child to appreciate the importance of avoiding high-risk foods when denied their favourite foods. Instead of enforcing the “DON'Ts” or “NOs”.

Try out these strategies:

1) Validate their feelings

- Use validating statements such as:

"I understand that you're upset about not being able to eat fries."



- Have an open conversation with your child to explain the need to adhere to food safety guidelines and to answer any questions they might have, using age-appropriate language.

2) Offer a substitute for their favourite outside foods



- Try frozen versions or pre-packed versions of their favourite meals instead. This includes frozen French fries, frozen nuggets and single serve frozen ice cream.
- Pre-packed sauces, such as chicken rice, satay, laksa, can be an easy way to satisfy their cravings while ensuring food safety.



3) Making cooking their favourite food an activity

- Instead of simply saying “no, you can’t eat pizza from xxxx”, engage your child in making their own version of their favourite food.



- Depending on your child’s age, this can include a wide range of activities such as washing/ cutting the food, helping to add toppings, cracking an egg, rolling out pizza dough, mashing potatoes, juicing oranges.
- This can help them feel positive and in control. Research has shown that children who cook their own meal accept and enjoy the food better.



Helping Your Child to Cope with Their Feelings

As your child goes through treatment and multiple changes in their activities of daily living due to cancer, they may experience difficulties coping with their feelings. Some of the common emotions include worries, anxiousness, sadness, anger, and guilt.

As adults, our role is not to get rid of or to protect our children from different emotions (which is actually not possible). Rather, it is to help them understand and effectively cope with all of their feelings.

Here are some ways you can help your child cope with their emotions:

1) Allow them to express their emotions, if they wish to talk to you about how they feel



- You can ask them to identify what they are feeling, and if they can identify why they may be feeling this way?

2) Let your child know that it is normal to feel what they are feeling

- Provide time and space for your child to share; It is ok if your child is not ready to share yet at that time.
- Let them know you understand and that their feelings are normal, validate.
- Let him/her know that you will always be there for them whenever they need.



3) Be physically and psychologically present

- Feelings first, problem-solve later: be with, and acknowledge, what they are feeling, rather than to immediately focus on solving their problems (problem-solving can come later).
- Try to avoid giving advice such as "Just be happy" and "Just think positive thoughts" as these can be very difficult to achieve.

4) Participate in a relaxing activity together such as slow breathing or a hobby they enjoy (e.g., reading, playing games)

- Introduce deep breathing through a balloon or bubble-blowing*



5) Be open and honest with your child about his/her health

- Although parents/caregivers may avoid telling the child the truth about his/her cancer due to love, such an approach though understandable, is difficult to sustain. Despite parents'/caregivers' best intentions, children do have a good sense that something is not right with their body and that the treatments are undoubtedly unpleasant.
- Honesty is the best way for your child to develop trust in you and the medical team.
 - It serves to protect your relationship with your child through difficult times during treatment.
- Explain to your child about his/her health condition in a child-friendly way.
 - There are child-friendly story books that you can use to share with your child about cancer and its treatment. You can inquire more from your healthcare provider and/or consider some of these as a starting point*
 - Psychologists and child life therapists at the hospital or the CCF can also help your child better understand and cope with cancer.



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