Teaching Good Food Habits

Be a good role model. Your child watches what you eat. If you eat and enjoy collard greens, chances are your child will try them too – if not now, then probably later. It’s not just what you say, it’s also what you do. As kids grow up, a brother, sister, and others in their life are role models, too. Remember most children want to grow up doing what others do.

- Keep fruits, vegetables, and other low-calorie foods handy. Skip the urge to keep a lot of candy, chips or soda around. Keep them out of sight.

- Do all you can to help your child feel good about himself no matter what shape or size he is. A positive attitude about himself helps your child eat in a normal and healthful way.

- Keep your children active. . . . play . . . . dance . . . limit the TV and computer time.

Skip the urge to reward, punish, or appease your child with food. Have you ever been tempted to say: “If you don’t eat one more bite, I’ll be mad!” “Clean your plate so you can play,” “No dessert until you eat your vegetables,” or “Stop crying, and I’ll give you a cookie”? Remarks like these may lead kids to eating problems. They may create unneeded conflict and struggles between you and your child at the table.

- Eating for parental approval or love teaches unhealthy behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs about food and themselves.
- Rewarding a clean plate teaches them to ignore body signals, and that may lead to overeating.
- Offering a food (dessert) as a reward for eating another (veggies) makes some foods seem better.
- Getting a food treat to feel better teaches kids to relieve negative feelings by eating. This can lead to overeating later on.

Instead use a non-food approach. Reward your child with attention and kind words. Console with hugs and talk. Show love by spending time and having fun together. Drop the “clean plate club.” Make mealtime pleasurable...not stressful.