NEWS LESSON

The Problem Is Not Cooking. It Is Negotiation.



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Is fussy eating a problem to solve, or a phase to wait out?
2. How much of our taste is formed by childhood, and how much by culture?
3. Why do parents take a refused meal personally?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**boundary**	☐	A	a deep and useful understanding of something
2	**ownership**	☐	B	connected with what a person eats and drinks
3	**nutritional**	☐	C	knowing a lot about food and how to cook it
4	**food-literate**	☐	D	connected with the substances in food that help the body to stay healthy
5	**insight**	☐	E	the feeling that something is yours and you control it
6	**dietary**	☐	F	the practical details of organising something
7	**logistics**	☐	G	the ability to picture things that are not in front of you
8	**imagination**	☐	H	a limit that shows where one person's choices end and another's begin

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Asked how they feed their own children, nine chefs described almost no cooking problems at all. What they described were problems of power, patience and ego.

1 Ask a professional cook how to make a child eat vegetables and you might expect technique. What nine chefs and food writers actually told the Guardian, in a feature by Mina Holland, is that technique is close to irrelevant. The difficulty they describe is social, and most of their hard-won insight concerns their own behaviour rather than their children's.

2 Tom Kerridge sets the tone by refusing the premise that some children are simply good eaters. He is fairly certain, he says, that every child is picky, and does not believe the reports of ten-year-olds enjoying beetroot and feta. His own son eats well, but the account of how is mostly logistics: feed him before he knows he is hungry.

3 The most quoted strategies are about handing over control. Kerridge gets his son building pizzas and threading kebabs, on the reasonable theory that participation changes the relationship to the plate. Marie Mitchell describes the boundary precisely: the adults decide what goes on the table, and the child decides what happens next. Anna Jones talks about ownership too, noting that her eldest only began eating widely after Japanese food entered his imagination through stories about ninjas. Appetite, in other words, has a cultural component long before it has a nutritional one.

4 Where they disagree is more instructive than where they agree. Hiding vegetables, a tactic many parents rely on, is rejected by two of them on grounds that are essentially ethical. Helen Goh grates courgette into a sauce and then says so, because she does not want food to become a trick; Mitchell's objection is epistemic, since a child who never knows what she ate cannot learn what she likes. Ravneet Gill declines to call sugar a treat, having concluded that the category itself created her own childhood problem. Jones, by contrast, cannot send a child to bed hungry and says so plainly, which is a more useful admission than a rule.

5 The deepest observation comes from Jackson Boxer, who feeds four children with barely overlapping preferences. He used to take refusal personally, and then understood that refusing food is one of the very few forms of power available to a child. In a household where cooking matters, he adds, they know precisely where the blade goes in. Rosie Birkett arrives at the same place from the other direction: as a food writer she kept making food exciting while her children wanted the opposite, and she had to separate her ego from what they were asking for.

6 None of this is dietary advice, and it should not be mistaken for it. These are nine individual households, several of them unusually food-literate and none of them a sample. What they offer instead is a correction to the idea that fussy eating is a failure of cooking. Margot Henderson, looking back on three grown children, remembers deciding that a missed meal would not starve anyone. Meera Sodha's version is the one most likely to be useful to a tired parent: stop calling the child fussy, because they are listening, and they will take you at your word.

Sources: The Guardian, Don't make sugar a treat, or hide the broccoli: top chefs on how to make your kids happy eaters. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Marie Mitchell and Helen Goh both reject hiding vegetables, but not for the same reason. T F NG
2. According to the article, Anna Jones's eldest son began eating widely after he learned about nutrition. T F NG
3. Tom Kerridge's son eats a wider range of food than most ten-year-olds. T F NG
4. The writer treats the nine households as a representative sample of parents. T F NG
5. Jackson Boxer and Rosie Birkett both had to separate their own feelings from their children's refusals. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

appetite	component	ego	epistemic	hard-won	objection	premise	sample

1. Telling parents that some children simply choose to be fussy rests on a _____ that the chefs reject.
2. Her _____ wisdom about family dinners came only after years of tearful standoffs at the table.
3. The review raised _____ concerns: with the records incomplete, how could anyone know the cause?
4. Texture is an important _____ of whether a child accepts a food, quite apart from its taste.
5. Her _____ to the new rule was not that it cost money but that nobody had been asked about it.
6. Interviews with twelve friends are too small a _____ to say anything about a whole country.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Active _____ in meal preparation often makes children more willing to taste new foods. **(PARTICIPATE)**
2. The two parents' approaches differ in style but are _____ the same. **(ESSENCE)**
3. The newspaper printed a _____ the next day after getting the chef's name wrong. **(CORRECT)**
4. Some doctors face an _____ dilemma when a patient asks them to hide the truth. **(ETHICS)**
5. Her _____ to eat anything green left her father at his wits' end. **(REFUSE)**

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level, learn phrasal verbs that carry a formal or abstract meaning, such as rule out, single out and boil down to. Check whether the verb needs an object and where it goes.

backed	boils	bring	hand	put	rule	singled

1. Experts cannot _____ out the possibility that early exposure to bitter flavours shapes later taste.
2. The report _____ out one family for praise and ignored the other eight.
3. Nothing she tried could _____ about a change in his eating until he started helping to cook.
4. The advice ultimately _____ down to one rule: do not turn mealtimes into a battle.
5. Her claim is not _____ up by any evidence, only by anecdote.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Nine households are not evidence. What can we reasonably take from them?
2. Sodha warns against labelling children. Where else do labels shape behaviour?
3. Should sugar be treated as a treat, a normal food, or something else?

9 Role-play: to hide it or to tell her?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the parent who wants to hide it

Your four-year-old will not eat vegetables. You want to grate courgette into the pasta sauce and say nothing. Explain why, and try to agree on a plan.

Student B · the parent who wants to tell her

You think your daughter should know what is in her food. Explain why, listen to your partner, and try to agree on a plan you both like.

Useful phrases

I'd rather not tell her.

That's a good point, but I'm not sure it's fair.

She won't learn what she likes if she never knows.

What if she refuses it?

How about we try both ways?

I think we're worrying too much.

Tell the class what you agreed, and whether either of you changed your mind.

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 E · 3 D · 4 C · 5 A · 6 B · 7 F · 8 G

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 premise · 2 hard-won · 3 epistemic · 4 component · 5 objection · 6 sample

6 Word forms

1 participation · 2 essentially · 3 correction · 4 ethical · 5 refusal

7 Language focus

1 rule · 2 singled · 3 bring · 4 boils · 5 backed

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**