NEWS LESSON

What Chefs Do When Their Children Will Not Eat



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Do children in your country eat the same food as adults at mealtimes?
2. How much choice should a child have about what they eat?
3. Does eating together as a family matter?

2 Key words

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

1	**reassuring**	☐	A	making you feel less worried
2	**striking**	☐	B	the paper or plastic around a sweet or snack
3	**strategy**	☐	C	other things you can choose instead
4	**wrapper**	☐	D	to hurt or damage someone
5	**deliberately**	☐	E	a plan for getting what you want
6	**labelled**	☐	F	on purpose
7	**alternatives**	☐	G	very clear and surprising, so that you notice it
8	**harm**	☐	H	described with a word that stays attached to you

3 Read

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

Nine professional cooks were asked how they feed their own families. Almost all of them described a fussy child, and none of them had a trick.

1 There is a particular kind of defeat in cooking something properly and watching a four-year-old push it away. It is reassuring, then, that it happens to people who cook for a living. The Guardian's Mina Holland asked nine chefs and food writers what their own children eat at home, and the honesty of the answers is the most striking thing about them.

2 Tom Kerridge, who runs five restaurants, begins by dismissing the competition. “I'm fairly certain every child is a picky eater,” he says, and he does not believe parents who claim their children happily eat beetroot and feta salads. His ten-year-old son, Acey, trains hard and burns energy constantly, so Kerridge's strategy is to get food in front of him before hunger turns into a request for whatever comes in the brightest wrapper.

3 A theme runs through several of the accounts: involvement. Kerridge gets Acey to thread peppers on to kebabs or build his own pizza, on the principle that a child who helped make something is more likely to eat it. Marie Mitchell, author of the Caribbean cookbook Kin, describes a version of the same idea as giving her five-year-old agency. The adults decide what goes on the table; what she does with it is her own business.

4 Two of them push back firmly on a popular tactic. Helen Goh cooks onions, carrots and celery into a base and grates courgette until it melts away, but she tells her sons exactly what is in it. “I don't want food to become a trick,” she says. Mitchell takes the same line, with a practical argument attached: if a child does not know she is eating something, she will never discover that she likes it.

5 The accounts also differ, which is worth noticing. Ravneet Gill deliberately refuses to frame sugar as a treat, believing that is where things went wrong for her as a child. Anna Jones admits she cannot bring herself to send a child to bed hungry, so she does make alternatives, while Mitchell and Rosie Birkett mostly do not. Jackson Boxer, who has four children, offers the most consoling observation of all: refusing food, he realised, is one of the few forms of power children have, which is why it should not be taken personally.

6 What almost nobody offers is a method. Birkett says pickiness is nearly always a phase and that what matters is the pattern over weeks and months. Margot Henderson, whose children are now in their late twenties and thirties, took the view that missing one meal would not harm them. And Meera Sodha, labelled fussy herself as a child, gives the one piece of advice that costs nothing: do not call them fussy, because they will believe you.

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. Tom Kerridge's way of dealing with hunger is to feed his son early. T F NG
2. Anna Jones always refuses to make a second meal for a child. T F NG
3. Helen Goh and Marie Mitchell both think a child should know what is in her food. T F NG
4. Ravneet Gill's parents used sugar as a reward when she was a child. T F NG
5. All of Margot Henderson's children are under thirty. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

agency	claim	consoling	defeat	involvement	pattern	reassurance	tactic

1. Parents who welcome a child's _____ in the cooking, by letting her stir or wash the vegetables, often see less refusal at the table.
2. Offering two sensible choices at snack time gives a toddler a sense of _____ over what she eats.
3. Hiding broccoli in a smoothie is a popular _____ for getting children to eat vegetables, though some chefs object to it.
4. My neighbour's _____ words, that every toddler goes through this, made me feel less alone.
5. One refused dinner is not a worry. The _____ of what a child eats over several weeks matters more.
6. Some parents _____ that their children happily eat anything, but few people believe them.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. If a child _____ to make the pizza herself, she will probably eat it. (ALLOW)
2. By the time dinner was ready, the toddler _____ a whole packet of crisps. (EAT)
3. You should not _____ children fussy, because they may start to believe it. (CALL)
4. My neighbour does not mind _____ a second meal for her son. (MAKE)
5. Jackson Boxer _____ that refusing food was a form of power, and he stopped taking it personally. (REALISE)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many phrasal verbs have a meaning you cannot guess from the two words, so learn the whole verb. The same verb with a different small word means something new: give in, give up.

brought	give	go	hand	pick	put	turn

1. Parents who _____ in to every complaint end up cooking three different meals.
2. She was _____ up by a grandmother who never let anyone leave the table hungry.
3. Many toddlers _____ down new foods at first, but they often change their minds.
4. Parents often _____ off introducing a new food, afraid of another refusal.
5. Meals can _____ wrong when a tired child is hungry and a tired parent is in a hurry.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. Goh says she does not want food to become a trick. Do you agree with her?
2. Jackson Boxer calls refusing food a form of power. What do you think of that?
3. Which of the chefs' approaches would work in your home, and which would not?

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 involvement · 2 agency · 3 tactic · 4 consoling · 5 pattern · 6 claim

6 Verb forms

1 is allowed · 2 had eaten · 3 call · 4 making · 5 realised

7 Language focus

1 give · 2 brought · 3 turn · 4 put · 5 go

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