

Pediatric Corner

By Dr. Michael Anderson, MD
CHILDREN'S PEDIATRIC CENTER: NORTHSIDE

Good to grow: Parenting tips for toddlers, tykes and tweens

TODDLERS (ages 2 and 3) preventing picky eating. If your toddler's finicky eating habits are hard to swallow, you might take a look at what you eat. Mothers are a major influence on children's food choices. If kids see you eating something and liking it, chances are they'll eat it, too. Offering your children a variety of foods is also good for overall health. If moms don't do this, their children run the risk of developing vitamin and mineral deficiencies. To encourage better eating habits, start young. Studies show that a high percentage of food preferences are formed as early as ages 2 and 3. Choose wisely. Avoid snacks that only offer empty calories. Kids need to understand that it's not just about eating what tastes good, but it's also about eating what's good for you.

Let them have their say. Offer a variety of foods and have your child choose three. The more kids get involved, the more apt they are to eat. Offering adult-size servings makes it hard for children to clean their plate. So let them put the items on their own plate, within reason, of course.

TYKES (ages 6 to 8) kids and bullying. For many parents facing down a bully has traditionally meant fighting back, and therefore we have had to learn to stick up for ourselves. If someone picked on you, you were expected to stand up to him or her. That's what we were taught, so that's what we've taught our children. It's an impulse that can be hard to overcome. Our culture has been one of handling aggressive situations with aggressive responses. We need to understand that refusing to fight back doesn't equate with being cowardly. Oftentimes bullies may be emulating adult behavior, reacting to violence they've seen on TV or attempting to dominate others as a way of appearing to be in control of the situation. Children don't have the skills to manage the process. Adults have to get involved. Some ways that parents can help: Get the whole story. Acknowledge that the problem exists. Ask your child to explain what is happening before you react.

Get involved. Ask your child what they think will help. Get their permission before approaching the bully's parent in a non-confrontational way, if you both think that will help. If that doesn't work, get the school involved. Alert your child's teacher or school administration. Once they know what's going on, they can help provide the supervision needed to stop the problem.

PULL QUOTE: Practice with your little one how they might handle a confrontation. Emphasize that they must be assertive, not aggressive. This helps build confidence and prepares them for the actual situation. Be supportive. Let them know you've got their back. It provides a protective shield that is empowering.

TWEENS (ages 9 to 12) kids ask the darnedest things. When our kids ask us questions about our youth, especially if it involved underage drinking, premarital sex or recreational drugs, we might be tempted to be evasive or unresponsive or to just flat-out lie. After all, many of us came up during the 1960's and 1970's when society's views of sex, drugs and social drinking were much more permissive. But with HIV/AIDS and substance abuse looming large, today's landscape looks very different. So how should you respond? Kids ask these types of questions because they are curious, and it helps them get to know you as a parent better. But that doesn't mean you have to be a buddy to your child. You're always a parent first. Remember that when you share information about your past it can have a significant impact on their behavior for years to come.

Here's some advice: Be selective about what you say. Don't advocate being dishonest, but as parents you have to hold back certain information, especially if you don't think the time is right to share it. For example, if you first had sex at an age that you feel was too young, you may not want to reveal exactly how old you were. Instead say it was younger than you thought it should've been. Remember, it's okay to say what you feel to be a better value for your kids growth and maturity.

Michael G. Anderson, MD, FAAP
Stephanie H. Anderson, DNP, RN, PNP-C, WNP-C
321 East Main Street • Canton, GA 30114
(across from the Bank of North Georgia)