



# the new dinnertime rules

“Clean your plate” is so last century. These seven updated rules will get your family eating healthfully—and happily—together.

by Liz Weiss and Janice Newell Bissex

**A**t first glance, establishing food rules may seem restrictive, but if they're realistic, easy to follow, and apply to parents and kids alike, rules can set the stage for a more positive, memorable, and nutritious mealtime experience.

## 1. ONE FAMILY, ONE DINNER

Promote Mom or Dad from short-order cook to executive chef. Plan the nightly menu and stick to it: Once the kiddos realize that one meal and one meal only will land on the dinner table, they will know not to ask for grilled cheese instead.

## 2. NO TV OR CELL PHONES

Can checking e-mails or returning texts wait until after the table is cleared? Of course! With fewer distractions, family members can slow down, relax, and talk. Bonding is so much easier when every beep and buzz doesn't distract.

## 3. TAKE A “NO THANK YOU BITE”...

To encourage family members to eat, or even just try, what's been served, insist that everyone take at least one bite of each item. Then, kids (or parents!) can either say, “No thanks. I'm not a fan,” or “Thanks, I'll have some more.” It's a low-key and often amusing way to introduce new foods and flavors.

## 4. ...UNLESS YOU HAVE A “TASTE BUD TURNOFF” PASS

Certain rules are meant to be broken...sometimes. It's important to respect personal prefer-

ences. So if a family member has a short list of “taste bud turnoff” foods—foods they've tried before and just can't seem to stomach—then they get a pass on the No Thank You Bite.

## 5. DO AT LEAST ONE THING TO HELP

The key to mealtime success is to take an all-hands-on-deck approach. When family members contribute to the meal, they quickly learn what it means to feed a family, night after night. Little ones can put out napkins and silverware, older kids and teens can chop vegetables or make a salad, and adults can do the dishes.

## 6. THINK OF A COMPLIMENT

Turn comments like, “Yuck, that broccoli looks gross,” to “That's the greenest broccoli I've ever seen.” Doling out compliments puts the kibosh on negative dialogue and fosters greater respect all around. When kids have to think of a positive spin on the plate in front of them, they're more likely to be open-minded about their meal.

## 7. ACT YOUR AGE

Be realistic about your expectations: Adults should be able to role model how to behave at the table—indoor voices, good manners, and a willingness to try everything with a smile—and kids should be allowed to make a bit of a mess or be excused after 20 polite minutes. ●

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### Two fun ways to teach kids your mealtime values



**Manners:** In *Wiggens Learns His Manners at the Four Seasons*, kids follow a chocolate Lab as he dines on fine food and learns how to behave at the table. By Alex von Bieder and Leslie McQuirk. (\$17, Candlewick)



**Healthy eating:** With the *Crunch a Color* game, kids earn points for eating healthy foods (and bonus points for things like trying new foods). Plus, the cards are printed on recycled paper. (\$13, crunchacolor.com)

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