



## Meal Coaching for Caregivers

Research shows us that food-based related prompts, both physical and verbal, given during mealtimes are associated with increased eating. Even if caregivers are met with negative reactions from an adolescent, prompts given by caregivers can help to increase meal completion.

There are different ways to provide prompts to your adolescent during mealtimes.

- 1) Direct Prompts\*
  - a. *Please pick up the food and eat it.*
  - b. *I am noticing that you are anxious AND I am wondering if you would be able to increase your pace.*
- 2) Non-direct Prompts
  - a. *Keep going!*
- 3) Physical Prompts\*
  - a. *Move the plate toward the adolescent.*
- 4) Positive Incentives
  - a. *If you eat this, you can have friends over.*
- 5) Negative Incentives
  - a. *If you don't eat this, we can't go out.*
- 6) Autonomous Comments
  - a. *Which one of these do you want?*
- 7) Information Provision
  - a. *Your body needs this calcium.*
  - b. *I can understand that your fullness is making it difficult to finish your meal right now AND your body needs this nutrition for continued functioning, strength, and energy.*

\*These prompts are the most strongly associated with increased food intake.

**Encouragement** is frequently met with a strong negative reaction but is NOT more strongly associated with food restriction.

Direct prompts often lead to negative food comments and overall negative reactions. Adolescents may respond by asking, "Why are you doing this to me?" It becomes important to tolerate our own distress when these situations arise.



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### Tips & Tools for Distress Tolerance

- 1) Validation
  - a. *I can see why you would feel this way because ... because ... because ....*
- 2) Plan ahead
  - a. When learning the meal plan, confidence is key for caregivers!
- 3) Utilize incentives
  - a. Identify a concrete plan and consider the overall strategy as it connects to motivation and goal setting.
- 4) Avoid prolonging the meal and engaging in negotiation
  - a. Do not engage in conversation about food / meal plan while the adolescent is eating. Be firm and empathetic, while holding firm boundaries.

### Remember:

- You cannot make your child eat or change
- Do not expect immediate change or extinction
- It is NOT your fault if your child doesn't eat
- Aim for progress over *time*
- Some part of your child wants to feel normal again