

Apportioned Guidance by Lisa Marie Lindenschmidt

“Mo, you just had a salad an hour ago! Why are you eating again?!”

Mo, whose face was shoved in the fridge, now turns to me. Her eyes are ablaze with a look she has crafted over the past year. This look is intended to shoot laser beams and make me question my self-worth. A couple of days, this look has worked; most days I just respond with exasperation.

“Mom! Gah! Duh! Because I'm hungry! Hel-LO! Isn't that why most people eat?!”

OK, the attitude was annoying, but what was even more annoying was that she was making a valid point. Why was I questioning her hunger? Why do I never ask her to validate her thirst? Where was this coming from? Was I reiterating some old programming taught to me by my grandma? I grabbed some chocolate, got a pen and paper, and went into my room to do some thinking.

What were some of the messages I received as a kid around food consumption?

- My food was doled out to me by the adults and I was expected to clean my plate. If I didn't get enough to eat, I couldn't have seconds or I'd get fat. If I was still hungry after dinner, I offered to clean the kitchen so I could munch on leftovers.
- Dinner was eaten with the family – no matter if I was hungry or not.
- If I was hungry, I couldn't eat until the appointed meal time.
- Snacks were only eaten in the mid-afternoon and could only be an apple or an orange.
- Dessert was only eaten at special occasions and/or only after dinner. Other sweets were eaten in secret.
- Drinks of any variety (*i.e.*, Coke, sweet tea) could be consumed at any time.

In other words, adults determined when I was hungry and what I could eat. My “job” was to do as I was told... and then rebel and eat in secrecy. For me, these messages bred a break in communication between me and my body – something I've been working to re-establish for years. These messages also reiterated the power-over dynamic adults often used with children. Food is the ultimate weapon for many adults; withholding as punishment or rewarding with “treats” is a common theme in this culture. So, what would happen if I took the emotions out of play? What would happen if my job was simply to provide a house full of healthy food and let her make decisions around her food consumption? Could I trust that all my education and nurturing had actually sunk in?

Armed with my new experiment, I began the trial the next day. Here was my first observation: Mo went to the fridge and started rifling through, looking for a snack. I bit my tongue and didn't ask what she was doing or make a snarky comment about her wasting electricity by keeping the door hanging open. I also didn't say anything about the fact that we'd just finished lunch a half hour ago. I continued doing the dishes. Eventually, she asked me what she could have as a snack.

“What does your body say it needs? A drink or something to eat?” I asked casually.

She did the pre-teen sigh and said, “I don't know.” And then she closed the door and said, “I think I'm just eating because I'm bored. Maybe I should just make a hot tea. Would you play Uno with me?”

Inside, I was jumping up and down with joy and excitement – for her and for myself. Outside, I said, “Yeah, sure. What kind of tea you want?”

As I was making our cups of tea, I realized that a lot of energy went into worrying about Mo. Have I done enough? Given her the right tools? Been a good enough example? And I think I'm done with putting all that energy into doubting. Today I trusted and today the results were good. And if on some days they aren't, then I have to trust that we'll be able to work through it... because I think the education and nurturing has sunk in... for both of us.

Lisa Marie Lindenschmidt is a raw foods chef and teacher and owner of Rite Food and Company (www.ritefoodandcompany.com), which offers workshops on intentional and joyful eating. Lisa Marie and her homeschooled daughter, Mo, record a weekly podcast – called Sweet Peas Podcast – chronicling their raw foods journey together.