



To Be Assertive...

As your child grows older, they will have more and more opportunities to participate in social activities that include food. You can help to prepare your child to handle social situations in a confident manner, demonstrating assertiveness.

What does it mean to be assertive? Assertive means to be confident, bold and self-assured. It is the ability to express our thoughts in a direct, honest, and appropriate way. Part of being assertive includes being able to:

- Know what you need
- Ask for what you need
- Ask in a polite, respectful, and confident way

You can help your child to be assertive.

1. **Help your child learn rehearsed responses.** These responses are answers to common questions that the child has practiced ahead of time. Children with PKU often get asked many questions about what they eat and drink and why. It is very helpful for them to have answers to these common questions on the ‘tip of their tongue’. These responses should be short, but true and respectful. They do not need to reveal a lot about PKU. Long answers might lead to a long discussion that may be uncomfortable for your child. Certain people may benefit from a more complete explanation of PKU, talk with your child about this.
2. **Help your child learn to say “no”** to foods they should not eat. Well-meaning people (such as friends, relatives, coaches, neighbors, etc.) will offer your child food. If your child is prepared with a “no thank you” and a brief explanation, it will be much easier to respond appropriately. These responses should also be polite, respectful, and short. For example, a “no thank you” can be said with “I can’t eat that”, “It’s not on my diet”, or “can I have a glass of water instead?”. Remember the other person’s need to be a generous host or to do their job.
3. **Plan for the social and group activities.** With a plan in place, your child will be able to enjoy the event without worry. Work with your child through the decision-making process to develop a plan. There are several options for a group event. Here are a few possibilities to discuss:
 - Eat “yes” foods or free foods that everyone else is eating. Turn down “no” foods.
 - Bring your own food.
 - Don’t eat.
 - Ask questions.
 - Be confident with rehearsed responses.

Having confidence will help your child make good food choices, while enjoying social activities.

If you are looking for further ideas, the book *Why Can’t I Eat That! Helping Kids Obey Medical Diets* by John F. Taylor and R. Sharon Latta might be of interest to you.



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