Wellness Wednesday

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6 Essential Conversations to Have with Your Kids Before Family Gatherings

Family gatherings can be a whirlwind of excitement and anxiety, especially for children. The hustle and bustle, the unfamiliar faces, and the noise can be overwhelming. As parents, it's crucial to prepare our kids for these events to ensure they feel comfortable and confident. Here are six essential topics to discuss with your children before the big family gathering, based on insights from family therapists.

1. Setting Expectations for the Day

Understanding the Environment

Before the gathering, take the time to explain what the day will look like. Discuss where the event will take place, who will be there, and what activities might occur. This helps children visualize the day and reduces anxiety about the unknown.

- **Who Will Be There?** Talk about family members and friends they might meet. Mention any cousins or playmates they can look forward to seeing.
- **What Will Happen?** Describe the schedule, including meal times, games, or special traditions that might take place.

Preparing for Sensory Experiences

Children, especially those who are sensitive to sensory overload, may struggle with loud noises or crowded spaces. Prepare them for potential sensory experiences they might encounter.

- **Sounds:** Explain that there may be music, laughter, or even the clattering of dishes.
- **Crowds:** Discuss how crowded spaces can feel and encourage them to find a quiet spot if they need a break.

2. Navigating Social Interactions

Encouraging Communication

Instead of giving a strict list of dos and don'ts, encourage your children to express their feelings and thoughts. This can help them navigate social interactions more effectively.

- **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage them to think about how they might feel in different situations. For example, "If you feel shy when meeting someone new, what could you do?"
- **Role-Playing:** Practice greetings and conversations. This can help them feel more prepared and confident.

Understanding Boundaries

Teach your children about personal boundaries and the importance of consent, especially regarding physical greetings.

- **Greeting Options:** Discuss different ways to greet people, such as high-fives, fist bumps, or simply waving.
- **Saying No:** Empower them to say "no" to hugs or kisses if they feel uncomfortable. Reinforce that it's okay to set boundaries.

3. Making Food Choices

Discussing Food Variety

Food is often a central part of family gatherings, and the abundance can be overwhelming for kids. Talk to them about the variety of foods they might encounter.

- **Balance and Choice:** Explain that there will be both healthy options and treats. Encourage them to enjoy a mix of both.
- **Practice Responses:** Help them rehearse polite ways to decline food they don't want to try. For example, "No, thank you, I'm full right now."

Encouraging Mindful Eating

Teach your children to listen to their bodies and make mindful choices about what they eat.

- **Body Signals:** Discuss how to recognize when they are hungry or full.
- **Enjoyment vs. Obligation:** Remind them that it's okay to enjoy food without feeling pressured to eat everything offered.

4. Taking Breaks When Needed

Recognizing Overwhelm

Let your children know that it's perfectly normal to feel overwhelmed during busy gatherings. Discuss the importance of taking breaks when needed.

- **Identifying Signs:** Help them recognize signs of overwhelm, such as feeling cranky or wanting to hide.
- **Designated Quiet Spaces:** Identify a calm area where they can retreat if they need a moment to regroup.

5. Fostering Connection Over Perfection

Emphasizing Authenticity

Remind your children that family gatherings are about connection, not perfection. Encourage them to be themselves and enjoy the moment.

- **Real Connections:** Discuss the importance of being kind and respectful rather than focusing on being perfect.
- **Sharing Experiences:** Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings during the gathering, fostering deeper connections with family members.

6. Preparing for Emotional Ups and Downs

Acknowledging Feelings

Family gatherings can bring a mix of emotions. Encourage your children to express how they feel before, during, and after the event.

- **Validating Emotions:** Let them know that it's okay to feel excited, nervous, or even sad. All feelings are valid.
- **Sharing Strategies:** Discuss coping strategies for managing emotions, such as deep breathing or talking to a trusted adult.

Preparing your children for family gatherings can significantly enhance their experience and reduce anxiety. By discussing expectations, social interactions, food choices, the importance of breaks, and emotional well-being, you equip them with the tools they need to navigate these events confidently. Remember, the goal is to foster connection and enjoyment, allowing your children to create lasting memories with family.

Pear Cranberry Crisp

INGREDIENTS

For the filling:

- cooking spray
- 6 cups ripe pears, peeled and diced
- 1 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
- 1½ teaspoons fresh orange zest
- ¼ cup honey
- ½ tbsp cornstarch
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon

For the Crumble Topping:

- ½ cup quick oats, uncooked (see package for gluten-free)
- ¼ cup monk fruit brown sugar, not packed (or regular brown sugar)
- ½ tablespoon oat flour, (see package for gluten-free)
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil, or oil of your choice
- ¼ cup chopped pecans
- 1 tablespoon ground flax seeds
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt

The holiday season is a time for gathering, celebration, and, of course, delicious food. One dessert that perfectly encapsulates the spirit of the season is the Pear Cranberry Crisp. This delightful dish combines the sweetness of ripe pears with the tartness of cranberries, all topped with a crunchy oat-nut crumble. Not only is it a treat for the taste buds, but it's also a thoughtful option for those with dietary restrictions, being naturally dairy-free and gluten-free.

Sweet and Tart Harmony

The beauty of the Pear Cranberry Crisp lies in its balance of flavors. The juicy sweetness of ripe pears, such as Bartlett or Bosc, pairs beautifully with the tartness of cranberries. This combination creates a delightful contrast that excites the palate. The addition of orange zest enhances the overall flavor profile, adding a refreshing citrus note that brightens the dish.

A Crunchy Topping

The topping is where the magic happens. Made from a blend of quick oats, nuts, and a hint of sweetness, it bakes to a golden brown, providing a satisfying crunch that complements the soft fruit filling. The use of coconut oil keeps the topping dairy-free while adding a subtle richness. This combination of textures—soft fruit and crunchy topping—makes each bite a delightful experience.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 1/8th of recipe, Calories: 196 kcal, Carbohydrates: 41 g, Protein: 2 g, Fat: 7 g, Saturated Fat: 3 g, Sodium: 37 mg, Fiber: 5.5 g, Sugar: 21.5 g

INSTRUCTIONS

How to Make It

Making the Filling

- **Preheat the Oven:** Start by preheating your oven to 325°F (160°C).
- **Prepare the Fruit:** In a large bowl, combine the diced pears, cranberries, orange zest, honey, cornstarch, and cinnamon. Toss until the fruit is well-coated.
- **Transfer to Baking Dish:** Lightly grease a 9x9-inch baking dish and pour the fruit mixture into it, spreading
- it evenly.

Preparing the Topping

- **Mix the Topping Ingredients:** In a separate bowl, combine the quick oats, brown sugar, oat flour, melted coconut oil, chopped nuts, ground flaxseed, and salt. Stir until everything is well mixed.
- **Add the Topping:** Evenly sprinkle the topping over the fruit filling, ensuring it covers the fruit completely.
- Baking the Crisp
- **Bake:** Place the baking dish in the preheated oven and bake for about 60 minutes, or until the topping is golden brown and the filling is bubbling.
- **Cool Before Serving:** Allow the crisp to cool for about 10 minutes before serving. This helps the filling thicken slightly.

Variations to Try

Fruit Alternatives

While pears and cranberries are a classic combination, feel free to experiment with other fruits:

- **Apples:** Substitute pears with your favorite apple varieties like Honeycrisp or Fuji for a different flavor.
- **Berries:** Swap cranberries for raspberries or blueberries for a sweeter twist.
- **Mixed Fruits:** Combine pears with apples or other seasonal fruits for a unique blend.

Dietary Adjustments

- **Vegan Option:** Replace honey with maple syrup or agave nectar.
- **Nut-Free:** Omit the nuts or substitute with seeds like pumpkin or sunflower seeds for crunch.
- **Spice Variations:** Experiment with spices like nutmeg, ginger, or cardamom for a different flavor profile.

Reference: SkinnyTaste

https://www.self.com/gallery/the-strength-building-workout-you-can-do-anywhere

Featured Exercise

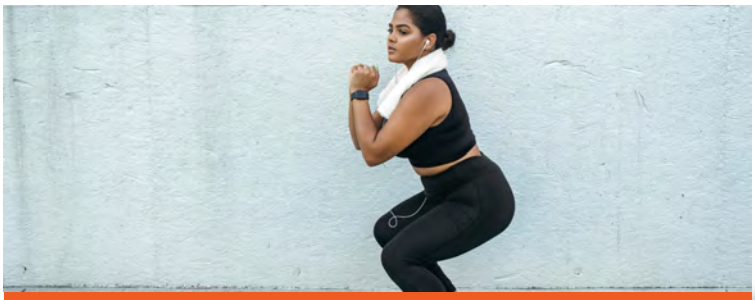
►Squat to Standing Crunch:

HOW TO DO IT:

1. **Starting Position:** Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and your arms at your sides.
2. **Squat Down:** Lower your body into a squat position by bending your knees and pushing your hips back. Keep your chest lifted and your back straight.
3. **Transition to Standing:** As you rise from the squat, engage your core and lift your arms overhead.
4. **Crunch:** Bring your right knee up towards your chest while simultaneously lowering your arms to meet your knee. This creates a crunching motion.
5. **Return to Start:** Lower your right leg back to the ground and return to the starting position. Repeat the movement on the left side.
6. **Repetitions:** Aim for 10-15 repetitions on each side, completing 2-3 sets.

THE BENEFITS:

The Squat to Standing Crunch exercise is a dynamic movement that combines strength training with core engagement, making it an excellent addition to any fitness routine. This exercise not only targets the abdominal muscles but also enhances overall stability and coordination.



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Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.

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