

MAKING DECISIONS  
ABOUT FOODS

Your Attitudes and Values

For Teenage Audiences

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## MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT FOODS

(Your Attitudes and Values)

### ACTIVITY 1

#### VALUE RECOGNITION ACTIVITY

Recognition of values can help a person understand why certain foods are chosen. This awareness is an important step along the road to the development of sound eating habits.

The following activity can be used to help youth recognize the values which influence their decisions regarding foods in different situations.

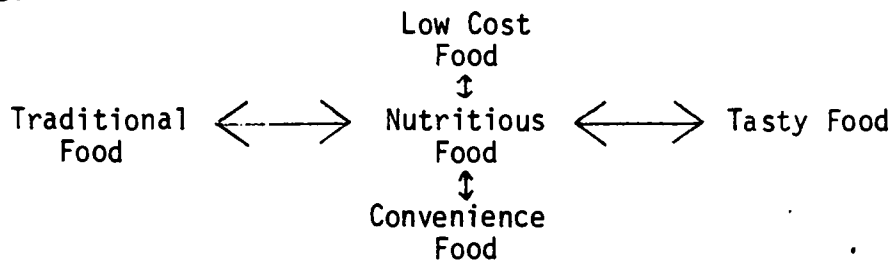
The activity can also be used to reveal the overall values of a group so that a leader can adapt a program accordingly. There is no point in discussing how to lower food costs if a group is mainly interested in convenience foods which may be more expensive.

#### Teaching Concepts:

The following concepts should emerge from the activity and the ensuing discussion:

1. Each person has values which influence food choices.
2. A person's values regarding food choices vary from situation to situation.
3. A person's values about food are an important part of their emotional and psychological makeup.
4. Any value important to a person may be compatible with sound nutrition.

For example:



#### Activity:

Provide each youth with a set of five three- by five-inch filing cards. (Different colored cards may be helpful). Ask them to write one of the following on each card: *Tastes good, Good for you, Quick and easy, Cheap, Tradition* is an optional word that might be particularly appropriate when ethnic groups are participating.

The leader then suggests situations in which the youth might find themselves. For each situation, the youth rank the value cards in order from the value most important to them to the value least important to them. Each youth then holds up the two value cards which are most important to them. It may be necessary to emphasize to the youth that there is no right or wrong answer to avoid the temptation of copying somebody else's responses. Discussion as to why certain value choices were made can follow each situation. Five situations allow for adequate discussion.

Sample: You are planning the foods to serve at your friend's party.

- |                   |   |                |                 |
|-------------------|---|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Tastes good    |  | Most Important |                 |
| 2. Quick and easy |   |                |                 |
| 3. Cheap          |   |                |                 |
| 4. Good for you   |   |                | Least Important |

### Situations:

There are many possible situations which could be used. Here are some suggestions:

1. You are planning what foods to cook for your young brothers and sisters on the nights that your mother works late.
2. You are deciding what foods to serve to your friends who are coming to your house after a football game.
3. You are deciding what foods to choose for lunch in the school cafeteria.
4. You are planning foods to have for a quick and easy breakfast.
5. You are planning which foods to eat while trying to lose weight.

### Discussion:

This activity can lead to various discussions of values about food.

- \* Why do these values vary from situation to situation?
- \* Are food values really important to each person? Why?
- \* What might cause a person to revise her values (e.g., change in their income, lifestyle, marriage)?
- \* Why do values about food vary from person to person?
- \* Is the way one person sees food necessarily better than the way another person does?
- \* What factors influence how a person sees food (culture, ethnic background, family, income, peer group, availability of food, psychosensory aspects (flavor, odor, appearance) of food)?

### Summary:

The value recognition activity has been used successfully with a variety of groups including high school students, weight control groups and general citizen groups. All that is required is a substitution of situations.

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## ACTIVITY 2

### HOW FOOD MEANINGS DEVELOP

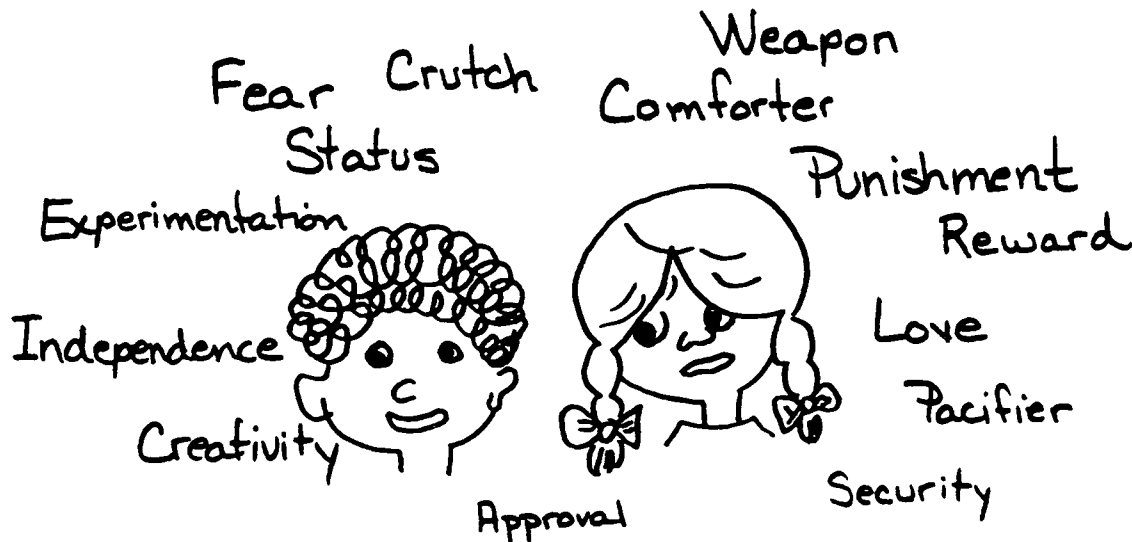
#### Objectives:

- \* to illustrate how food associations and meanings can develop
- \* to stress that we not only feed food but we also feed attitudes
- \* to explore ways to convey associations conducive to the development of good food habits

#### Teaching Technique:

A picture of an infant or young child is centered on a poster, transparency, or blackboard. Words which convey an attitude or association or emotional use of food are placed in a spiral around the infant (see illustration). They are added one at a time, giving everyday, real life examples of how food takes on that meaning or use. For example:

- \* "A child learns to associate food with "security" when his hunger cries bring someone who cuddles and feeds him, thus relieving his hunger, warming him, making him feel cared for." (place word "security" on at this time).
- \* "He learns to use food as a "comforter" or crutch if every time he skins a knee or the neighborhood children refuse to play with him, mother takes him in and soothes his wounds with candy or cookies."



The leader may give the examples to illustrate the point or may solicit examples from the learners, e.g., "How do we learn to use food as a comforter or crutch?"

Some food meanings and how they may develop are outlined below:

#### FOOD MEANINGS

Security

#### EXAMPLES OF HOW MEANINGS DEVELOP

When an infant cries, someone feeds him, cuddles him, makes him feel cared for. Food represents the security of being cared for.

## FOOD MEANINGS

## EXAMPLES OF HOW MEANINGS DEVELOP

Pacifier	If every time a child cries, he is given food, whether or not it is a hunger cry.
Experimentation	A child learning about his environment, loves to feel, smell, play with food (may be very frustrating to parents, but is a natural developmental phase for the child).
Weapon	A child soon learns that at an age when he has little control over his environment, he can use food as a weapon of revenge or to get attention - by refusing to eat, demanding food, or throwing food.
Punishment	Parents withdrawing food, e.g., dessert for bad behavior or going to bed without supper, teach this meaning of food.
Reward	Food is often given to reward accomplishment, good behavior. (Unfortunately sweets are the most widely used food reward).
Independence	A child may use food as a way to express independence and individuality, i.e., develops own likes and dislikes in teen years rejects family food patterns.
Love	Food is given to express love, e.g., Valentine chocolates; or mother saying "don't you like mommy's dinner?" conveying the idea that to reject mommy's food is to reject mommy. Child learns to give and eat food to show love.
Comforter	A child who skins knees or is rejected by other children is comforted and consoled with cookies or candy, thus learns to associate eating as a way to handle life's problems.
Crutch	Food is used to relieve boredom or loneliness, to handle anxiety or disappointment or unhappiness. In other words it becomes a substitute or crutch to cope with unhappiness in one's personal life.
Fear	An unhappy, traumatic experience with food such as becoming sick on it may cause a child to fear eating that food in the future.
Approval	Eating the favored foods of one's peer group or "cleaning the plate" for mommy may be used as means to win approval and acceptance.
Status	Serving or eating exotic or gourmet or expensive foods may be done to impress others with one's worldliness or wealth.
Creativity	Food preparation may be an outlet for self-expression just as some people may use crafts, hobbies.

Group discussion can evolve around such issues as:

- \* Which of these meanings are positive influences and which ones negative influences on good food habits?
- \* What can be done to feed better attitudes?
- \* Which of these influences are having an impact on your eating habits?
- \* What else, other than food, could be used as rewards, comforters, symbols of love, etc.?