



McCaskill Family Services, PLLC

Pediatric Psychologist & Psycho-Educational Evaluation Specialists

Main Business Office: 409 Plymouth Rd., Suite 250, Plymouth, MI 48170

Brighton Location: 2040 Grand River Annex, Suite 300, Brighton, MI 48114

Phone: (734) 416-9098, Ext. 1 FAX: (734) 416-0158

www.mccaskillfamilyservices.com office@mccaskillfamilyservices.com

More Than the Meal: Helping Everyone Feel Comfortable This Holiday Season

By Kimberly Hesano, RN-BSN

McCaskill Family Services – Eating Disorder Program

Thanksgiving is often described as a time for gratitude, connection, and comfort food. But for many individuals navigating eating disorders, body image concerns, or disordered eating, the holidays can bring a wave of anxiety instead of joy. Between comments about food, weight, and appearance, and the pressure to “eat the right amount,” this season can feel especially triggering. As a nurse who works with individuals in recovery, I’ve seen how small moments at the table can either support healing or unintentionally cause harm. Let’s talk about how we can make this upcoming Holiday get-togethers more supportive, compassionate, and inclusive for everyone.

1. Rethink the “You Look So Good” Comment

It’s common to hear well-meaning phrases like, “*Wow, you’ve lost weight—you look great!*” around the holidays. While intended as a compliment, comments like this can be painful for someone in recovery. When we equate looking “good” with being smaller, it can send the message that a person wasn’t attractive or healthy before, or that their worth is tied to their body size. We never know what someone is going through—weight loss can come from illness, stress, or relapse into disordered eating.

Instead, try compliments that focus on the person, not their body:

- “Your smile lights up the room.”
- “You seem really happy today—it’s great to see.”
- “That color looks amazing on you.”
- “I love how thoughtful you are.”
- “I’m so glad you were able to make it here.”

These affirmations remind people that they are valued for who they are—not for how they look.



2. Skip the “Earned My Meal” Talk

Holiday meals often come with side comments like, “*I’m getting seconds because I worked out this morning,*” or “*I’ll have to hit the gym after this!*” These types of statements reinforce the idea that food needs to be “earned” or “burned off,” which can be especially distressing for individuals working on repairing their relationship with food. Food is not a reward or a punishment—it’s nourishment, connection, and tradition. Instead of framing eating as something that needs to be justified, focus on the joy of the meal and the company around you.

3. Be Mindful About Food and Weight Conversations

When families gather together, talk about diets, new workout plans, or changes in weight can easily sneak into conversation. Try gently redirecting the topic if it starts to head that way.

You might say something like:

- “Let’s change the subject—I’d love to hear how your semester’s going!”
- “Can we talk about something other than weight? I’m trying to keep this a positive space today.”

These small redirections protect the emotional space for those who might be silently struggling.



4. Focus on Connection, Not Comparison

The holidays can bring up comparison—how we looked last year, what we’re eating compared to others, or how we “should” feel. Instead, make it a goal to connect rather than compare.

Ask questions that invite meaningful conversation:

- “What’s something you’re grateful for this year?”
- “What’s your favorite Thanksgiving memory?”
- “What’s a recipe that always makes you feel at home?”

These questions help shift focus from bodies and food to memories, gratitude, and belonging.

5. A Gentle Reminder: You Don’t Owe Anyone an Explanation

If you are someone in recovery or working on your relationship with food, remember—you never have to justify your plate, your appetite, or your body. You don’t owe anyone an explanation for what you eat or don’t eat. The holidays can be hard, but they can also be healing when surrounded by understanding, compassion, and supportive people.

This season, let’s all be mindful of our words, focus on connection over commentary, and remind one another that the most beautiful thing at the table isn’t the food—it’s the people gathered around it.

If you or someone you love is struggling with disordered eating, our team at McCaskill Family Services is here to help. We provide compassionate, evidence-based care for individuals and families navigating eating disorders and body image challenges. Learn more about our Eating Disorder Program here:

<https://www.mccaskillfamilyservices.com/eating-disorders.html>

