



When Progress Stalls or Regresses

- **Old Patterns Re-emerge:** Sometimes progress stalls because old patterns are hard to break and parents may still be participating in counterproductive feeding practices. Be prepared to feel lured back into pressure tactics, or to be told by a new doctor or therapist to use pressure.
- **Still Pressuring:** Often progress stalls when parents are doing some steps, but not others: still bribing with dessert, still lecturing, still spoon-feeding every bite, still pressuring, begging, or taking the child to pressuring therapy. Even with all the steps in place, the last bit of pressure may be what is said, and it can be so subtle that parents are surprised when we point out how certain comments are perceived as pressure.
- **Bribing with Dessert:** Bribing with dessert is the tactic that parents most commonly cling to. Serving dessert after the meal is so ingrained that dangling the dessert in front of the child to shape their eating feels natural. Add in other adults who think they are helping by holding back dessert until your child eats something “healthy,” and it is easy to see why parents are reluctant.
- **Find Your Own Pace:** Maybe you haven’t gotten all the steps down yet. Making smaller changes and progressing slowly is also a fine way to do things. Some families ease into this process over many months, while others implement it all at once.
- **Don’t Set a Deadline:** But you might be selling yourself (and your child) short if you have a deadline for STEPS+. All too often, the deadline approaches while the parent is still learning how not to pressure, or hasn’t quite gotten hold of the routine and is still catering. Deadlines also invite an agenda to the table, rather than a focus on providing a supportive experience, and the agenda invites pressure.
- **Your Own Eating:** If you have conflicted feelings about eating or your weight, as many adults do, and it is holding back progress for your family, find help. Your feelings can influence how you respond to your child’s eating.
- **Your Anxiety:** If you feel like your child is making progress, but your own anxiety is overwhelming, you too may be stuck in some wagon rut neural pathways: that automatic response of dread, even when you know better. Parenting is one of the most potent triggers for our own past—joyful, sorrowful, or traumatic.
- **Be kind to yourself and your child in this process. Change is hard!**