What does your children's behavior tell you about what they eat?

The well-known adage, *You are what you eat*, was coined by the nutritionist Victor Lindlahr in the 1920s. Much has been said and thought about the effects of food on our minds and bodies. But the Appleton Wisconsin high school has given it new meaning. The school was considered out of control. Weapons and drug violations, student disruptions, suicides, expulsions and drop-outs were common. That was seven years ago before one of their science classes conducted an eating experiment with three mice.

Jeffrey Smith, author of *Seeds of Deception*, and writing for the Institute for Responsible Technology reported in September, 2008 that since Appleton High School's cafeteria has replaced all their processed foods with whole, nutritious food, the school's behavior problems have disappeared. "After the change in school meals, the students were calm, focused, and orderly…. The new diet and improved behavior has lasted for seven years, and now other schools are changing their meal programs with similar results."

In the experiment, three mice were fed the kinds of junk food that high schoolers ate every day. "The mice freaked out," Smith reported. "Their behavior was totally different than the three mice in the neighboring cage. The neighboring mice had good karma; they were fed nutritious whole foods and behaved like mice. They slept during the day inside their cardboard tube, played with each other, and acted very mouse-like. The junk food mice, on the other hand, destroyed their cardboard tube, were no longer nocturnal, stopped playing with each other, fought often, and two mice eventually killed the third and ate it. After the three month experiment, the students rehabilitated the two surviving junk food mice with a diet of whole foods. After about three weeks, the mice came around."

Other schools conducted similar experiments with the same results. In Holland, an experiment focused specifically on genetically modified (GM) corn and soy processed foods resulting in abhorrent mouse behavior. It was determined that the junk food used in the Wisconsin experiments also contained GM foods which were automatically eliminated with the removal of all processed foods. A study reported in *Science* in 2002 determined that "food molecules act like hormones, regulating body functioning and

triggering cell division. The molecules can cause mental imbalances ranging from attention-deficit and hyperactivity disorder to serious mental illness."

Now it is known that the larger problem with GM foods is that their composition can change radically because the genes that are inserted into the foods' DNA can create "unpredicted, irreversible changes" without anyone's knowledge. The implications go on.

Is disruptive, unsuccessful behavior in children caused by the food they eat? Certainly anyone who is a regular reader of this column knows how much I focus on the quality of the parent-child relationship in determining children's behavior, but the environment in which the child is raised includes the food provided. Frustrated parents trying to get nutrition into a picky eater often resort to any food, so long as the child will eat it. And schools work with limited budgets that usually prohibit the expense of natural foods. But what are the long term costs?

A mother in one of my parenting groups complained regularly about the hyper, out of control behavior of her son, who at age six was a constant visitor to the principal's office. After professional evaluations and a diagnosis of ADHD, she decided to eliminate yellow and red food dye in her son's foods. Over the summer, her son's behavior changed dramatically. "He is a different child," she reported. "And now he'll even bring me foods that just look a certain way and say, 'Mom, I can't eat that.'"

Like this six year old, animals too will avoid eating certain foods. In one school, the students tried to conduct the same experiment on the same mice a few months later, but the mice refused to eat the junk food! And as Smith writes, "Eyewitness reports from all over North America describe how several types of animals, when given a choice, avoided eating GM food. These included cows, pigs, elk, deer, raccoons, squirrels, rats, and mice."

Begin at home by evaluating the foods your children are eating. Try your own experiments and write down the results. Our children's behavior is always telling us something. Our job is to look at that behavior as a clue rather than an indictment of disobedient, disrespectful children and look to what is causing it. Not an easy task. But

imagine how confusing it must be to a child who is punished for behavior brought on by a reaction to food. Then look into the foods supplied in the schools and organize to make changes. It is for the benefit of everyone, including teachers.

With Halloween approaching, think about making deals with your children for certain amounts of their candy, especially unnatural, dye colored candy. You can buy it from them, while teaching them about its effects. One mother told me about "the Halloween Fairy" that comes to her house after trick or treating. Her children choose which candy they want to save and the rest goes into a bag hung on their door to be traded by the Halloween Fairy for a special treat.