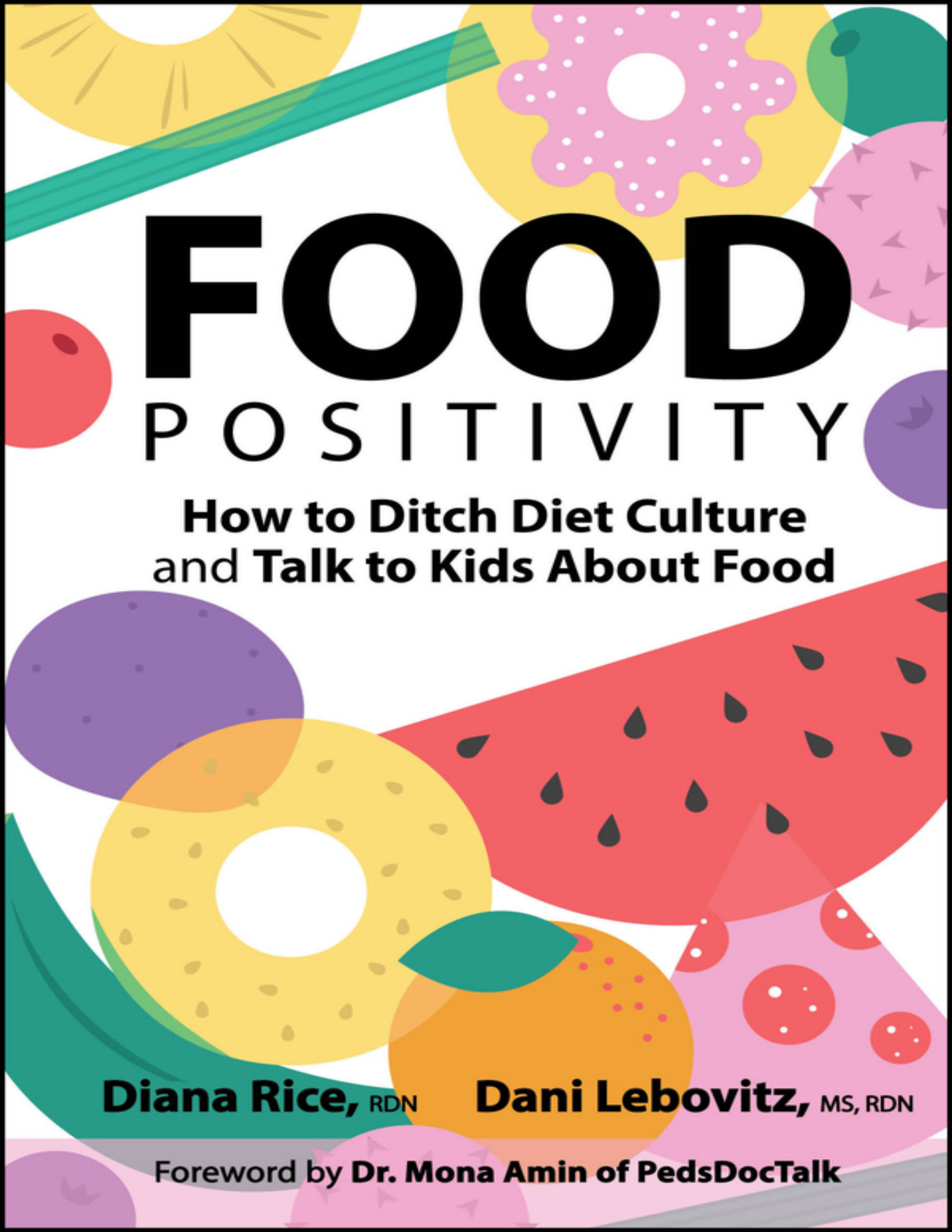




FOOD POSITIVITY

**How to Ditch Diet Culture
and Talk to Kids About Food**

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Foreword by **Dr. Mona Amin of PedsDocTalk**

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How to Ditch Diet Culture and Talk to Kids About Food

DIANA RICE AND DANI LEBOVITZ

J JOSSEY-BASS™

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*For every parent choosing compassion over control,
curiosity over fear, and raising a generation free to trust
their bodies and find joy in food.*

Foreword

AS A PEDIATRICIAN, there are so many stories and faces you never forget. These are the stories that shape your values as a doctor, mother, and advocate.

I think of the mom with her thriving 15-month-old on her lap, pleading, “Please tell me what to feed him so he gains weight. He’s so scrawny.” Or another parent asking me to tell his teenage daughter she’s “fat” and needed to lose weight. Two very different bodies, the same fear: that their child wasn’t in the “right” body.

I see this tension everywhere. Toddlers pushed to eat past fullness to “catch up.” Lean kids urged to chase calories instead of balance. Children in larger bodies shamed for honoring hunger taught not to trust themselves. I’ve met high schoolers who binge in secret.

The result is the same: children disconnected from hunger and fullness cues, learning to see food as something to control instead of enjoy. Parents want their kids to thrive, but many feel stuck, caught in mealtime battles, weighed down by guilt, and unknowingly repeating the struggles they grew up with.

That’s why this book, *Food Positivity*, is essential.

When I first connected with Diana, we talked on my podcast about how diet culture shows up in childhood. Her words resonated deeply, not just as a pediatrician but as a mom raising kids in a world that ties worth to appearance. When I came to know Dani, I saw how beautifully their strengths come together. Dani brings the joy of food exploration, the developmental insight, the playful tools parents crave. Diana brings compassion, clarity, and a deep understanding of food and body image struggles. Together,

they are committed to breaking cycles and offer what parents desperately need: expertise wrapped in empathy, evidence made practical.

Parenting around food feels harder today. Most parents want to raise kids who feel positive about food and confident in their bodies, but they were never given the tools to sort through their own insecurities. Then layer on BMI charts that reduce kids to numbers and social media feeds that are packed with filtered and AI-edited bodies, “what I eat in a day” videos, misguided nutrition advice, and wellness trends disguised as health—it’s no wonder families feel like they’re failing.

The cost of staying stuck is steep: mealtime battles, kids disconnected from hunger cues, disordered eating that can last a lifetime, and another generation carrying the shame we hoped to leave behind.

What makes this book different is that it doesn’t just focus on kids or parents; it speaks to both. *Food Positivity* helps parents reshape their own food and body stories while raising a generation free from shame. That mirrors the philosophy I share in my own work: the only way we can truly support our children is by being willing to look inward.

This book shows you how. It doesn’t lecture or overwhelm. It offers real words for the moments that matter, when a child refuses dinner, begs for dessert, or says, “I’m fat.” It reframes health as more than what’s on a plate: nourishment, yes, but also safety, connection, and joy. With practical scripts, compassionate strategies, and evidence-based tools, it makes parenting around food and bodies less stressful while raising kids who trust themselves and grow up free from shame.

In my work, I've seen the shift when parents trust their child's body instead of controlling it. Dani and Diana's SAFE framework—Safety, Autonomy, Flexibility, and Experience—captures this. Kids don't learn to love food through pressure or shame but through safe experiences, laughter at the table, and the freedom to say “no, thank you” without fear.

As you begin to read *Food Positivity*, I hope you feel relief. Relief from micromanaging every bite. Relief from guilt. Relief in knowing that in parenting; perfection isn't the goal. Connection is. With small shifts in language and approach, you can raise kids who trust their bodies, enjoy food, and grow up free from shame.

Some of what you'll read may feel hard to hear. Especially if you grew up where food felt shameful, meals were stressful, or your body wasn't loved for what it was. Sitting with that discomfort can stir up grief, anger, or resistance. But that discomfort is not a sign you're doing it wrong. It's a sign you're breaking the cycle. The only way we change ourselves, and raise a generation free from the pain we carried, is by being willing to get uncomfortable.

My hope for every parent reading is this: may you raise kids who know food as joy, not judgment. May you raise kids who see their bodies as homes, not projects. And may you find yourself, as much as your children, set free from shame around food and bodies.

When you change the story for yourself, you change it for your children. That's the real gift of this work, and it starts here.

—Dr. Mona Amin
Board-Certified Pediatrician, IBCLC, and MomCreator
of the Peds Doc Talk Community

**Host of *The PedsDocTalk* Podcast, helping parents
find the confidence and calm they need**

Introduction

YOUR GRANDMOTHER HAD cigarettes and the cabbage soup diet. Your mom had Slim Fast and *Jane Fonda's Workout* at the peak of the low-fat craze. (SnackWell's, anyone?) They both had Weight Watchers, and maybe you did too.

You had Atkins, paleo, and the South Beach Diet (just reminiscing on a few...). And you grew up with the unshakable image of 1990s and 2000s music stars in low-rise pants with impossibly flat stomachs. And you often think of Kate Moss's infamous words ringing in the back of your mind:

"Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels."

In the last few years, it's been all about trends like "clean" eating, Whole30, keto, and intermittent fasting. And let's not forget the parade of scientifically shaky food fears—seed oils, food dyes, processed foods—on and on it goes.

The diets may change. The food rules may shift, but the message stays the same:

Your body is wrong.

Your appetite is out of control.

If you could just *fix* this pesky problem of food and your body size once and for all, your life would finally be better.

The Moment You Knew Something Was Off

You've probably felt it, the tension between what you were taught about food and bodies growing up and the way you want things to be for your kids.

Maybe it's that unsettling feeling when your child repeats a food rule you never meant to pass down, like finishing dinner before they can have dessert. Or the weight (pun not intended, but here we are) of how diet culture shows up—at the doctor's office, in schools, on their lunch trays.

Maybe you hear echoes of your own childhood at the dinner table in your home:

“Are you sure you need seconds?”

“You don't want to get fat, do you?”

Or maybe you heard:

“You're skin and bones, eat something!”

“Other kids would be grateful for this food.”

And you think to yourself: *I don't want this for them. I don't want this for me either. But what on Earth do I do instead?*

You're not the only one.

Many of us are navigating the same murky water, trying to raise kids in a world where food and bodies carry way too much baggage and distract us from the things that really matter. You're ready to do things differently.

We Grew Up in Diet Culture. So Now What?

It makes sense that you're struggling. A 2022 survey by *Good Housekeeping* found that three-quarters of women have a mental list of “good” and “bad” foods.

And so, without even realizing it, we pass them down. That same survey found that 62% of parents discuss food and exercise in relation to weight with their children. We think we're helping. We all want our kids to be healthy after all! But diet culture has conditioned us to believe that certain foods are dangerous, that weight is the ultimate measure of health, and that "doing it right" means constantly policing what our children are eating.

And yet...the more we try to get food "right," the more we suffer.

We're all born with the ability to trust our bodies. Babies cry when they're hungry and stop when they're full. Toddlers eat three bananas one day and refuse them the next. But over time, diet culture teaches them to ignore those signals, just like it taught us.

We learn to mistrust our hunger, fear certain foods, and tie our worth to our weight. Worst of all, it takes us away from what really matters, like:

- Making memories with our kids surrounded by microwave popcorn and gummy candy on movie night
- Confidently posing for a family photo without sucking in our stomach
- Simply enjoying food without guilt

The Most Concerning Part? The Impact on Our Kids

A 2023 *Journal of the American Medical Association* meta-analysis found that 22% of children and adolescents engage in disordered eating. Another study reports that as many as 17.9% of girls and 2.4% of boys will be diagnosed with an eating disorder by young adulthood.

And we know exactly how it happens. Eating disorders are influenced by a variety of factors, but living in a culture that prioritizes some body types over others plays an enormous role. We know that we can draw a straight line from these alarming statistics back to a lifetime of being taught to ignore our *own* hunger signals.

Back to hearing that broccoli is *good* and donuts are *bad*. Back to our parents' hushed whispers of "*Don't you know how many calories are in that?*" and "*Shouldn't you eat something healthy first?*"—voices that still echo in our heads every time we reach for a snack or feed our kids.

The Parenting Paradox: Freedom vs. Fear

We want to raise kids who feel free to be exactly who they are, to dress how they want, to love who they love, and to chase their dreams.

But when it comes to food and their bodies? That freedom feels terrifying. Because we've been taught that letting go of food rules means letting go of their future.

That if we don't control what they eat...

...they'll eat nothing but junk.

...they'll be bullied for their size.

...they'll be unhealthy, or worse.

We want them to be well-nourished, of course. But we also live in a world that tells us fatness is a fast track to disease and early death (which isn't true by the way—more on this in [Chapter 1](#)).

So how do we let go of control without feeling like we're setting them up for struggle? How do we raise kids to trust

their bodies when we've spent a lifetime being told we can't trust ours? How can we shift from control to support when we don't even know what that support is supposed to look like?

The Tipping Point

Thankfully, things are changing. More and more people, including medical organizations, researchers, and everyday parents, are questioning the dangers of diet culture. Athletes, musicians, actors, and influencers who don't fit the traditional beauty mold are taking up space, sharing their stories, and offering our kids the role models we never had.

And, we have research on our side. Studies are clear that the way we talk about these subjects in our kids' early years affects their long-term relationships with food and their bodies. We also know that body shape and size are mostly determined by genetics and environmental factors, not the "hard work and dedication" touted by diet culture. And we've learned that the number-one predictor of weight gain in both children and adults is, ironically, trying to lose weight in the first place.

But most importantly, we're finally realizing our power as parents. We're the first generation with the opportunity to break these cycles—to say *enough* to the food guilt, the body shame, the relentless pursuit of thinness disguised as "health."

What if we redefined what food means, not just for our kids, but for ourselves too?

Diet culture has stolen so much joy from eating, reducing it to numbers, rules, and guilt. It's time to take that joy back, for our kids, and for ourselves. It's time for **Food Positivity**.

What Is Food Positivity?

Every parent wants their kids to grow up healthy, eat a variety of foods, and feel good in their bodies. But so many of us find ourselves stuck—in dinner battles, negotiations over sugar, or the quiet fear that our children will inherit the same struggles with food and body image that we grew up with.

Food Positivity is more than how we feed kids—*it's how we raise them*. It's the decision to make mealtimes a place of trust instead of conflict, joy instead of guilt, and connection instead of control. Instead of focusing on rules, pressure, or perfection, Food Positivity supports the whole child—body, mind, and spirit. It gives parents practical tools to make mealtimes calmer *today* while raising kids who explore food with curiosity, trust their bodies, and eat well for *life*.

Our mission is simple: to help families break cycles of shame and guilt so the next generation can inherit something better—*a relationship with food and their bodies rooted in safety, trust, joy, and whole-child well-being*.

A Fresh Perspective: More Than Just “Food Neutrality”

You may have heard of Food Neutrality, which teaches that all foods have equal moral value, meaning you're neither “good” or “bad” based on what you eat. It removes those labels altogether.

Food Positivity takes it further. It's not just about what we take away, it's about what we *add*:

Instead of only removing guilt, we create joy.

Instead of avoiding pressure, we build confidence.

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