

Feeding Difficulties Parent/Staff Training

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Aims

- To outline the complexity of eating and why many children struggle to eat.
- To demonstrate how to help the child develop the oral motor and sensory skills required for successful eating.
- To discuss the top 10 myths of eating and the impact on the child.
- To recognise that there are many steps to eating and that swallowing food is not the only goal.
- To describe general treatment strategies which can be implemented at home/school to support the child's feeding development.
- To share the importance of the division of responsibility in feeding.
- To provide tips to implement at home/school to help the child to build a healthy relationship with food both now and in the future.
- To show that meal times can be fun and enjoyable for the whole family.
- To troubleshoot common problems and provide tips to manage these.
- To share tools to use at home/school to help the child explore new foods.

Scope of the Problem

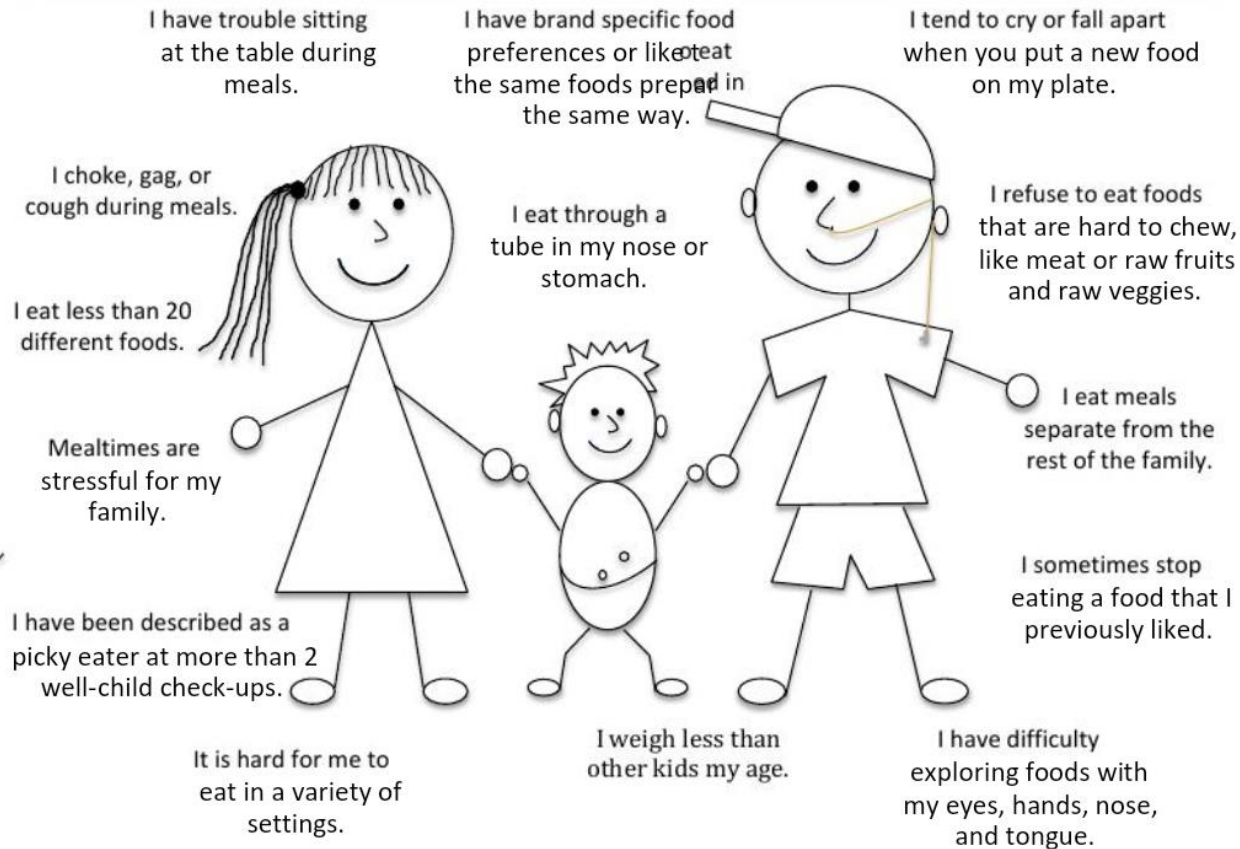
Worldwide 75 million girls and 117 million boys who are moderately or severely underweight (2016)

50 million girls and 74 million boys who are obese.

More children and adolescents are moderately or severely underweight than obese.

Picky Eaters and Problem Feeders

Am I at Your Table?



Introduction

- **Don't tell yourself that children are just naturally fussy**
- **Forget everything your mother/grandmother told you!**
- **Don't label your child as a fussy eater**



Common Reasons Children Won't Eat

- Pain
 - Discomfort
 - Immature motor, oral-motor or swallow skills
 - Sensory processing problems
 - Learning/Behavioural
 - Nutritional
-
- Additional Factors
 - Child, parent and environment factors



Oral Motor - Introduction

Some children pocket, refuse, gag, vomit, or spit out food because they know they don't have the oral motor skills to properly manage the food.

The child needs to have efficient tongue lateralisation, tongue elevation, jaw strength and rhythmic chewing to manage foods.

If a child is behind on any of these oral motor skills, then eating can actually be dangerous and some foods a choking hazard. The child may refuse the foods as a self defence mechanism.

Oral Motor Activities – Tongue Exercises

- Use vibrating toothbrush (stimulates tongue movement)
- Licking icecream, ice lollies or lollipops outside the mouth
- Place yoghurt or sauce on the corners of the mouth and ask the child to lick it off
- Sing la la la
- Try to touch tongue tip to nose
- Blow raspberries
- Count teeth with tongue (use a mirror)

Oral Motor Activities – Lip and Cheek Exercises

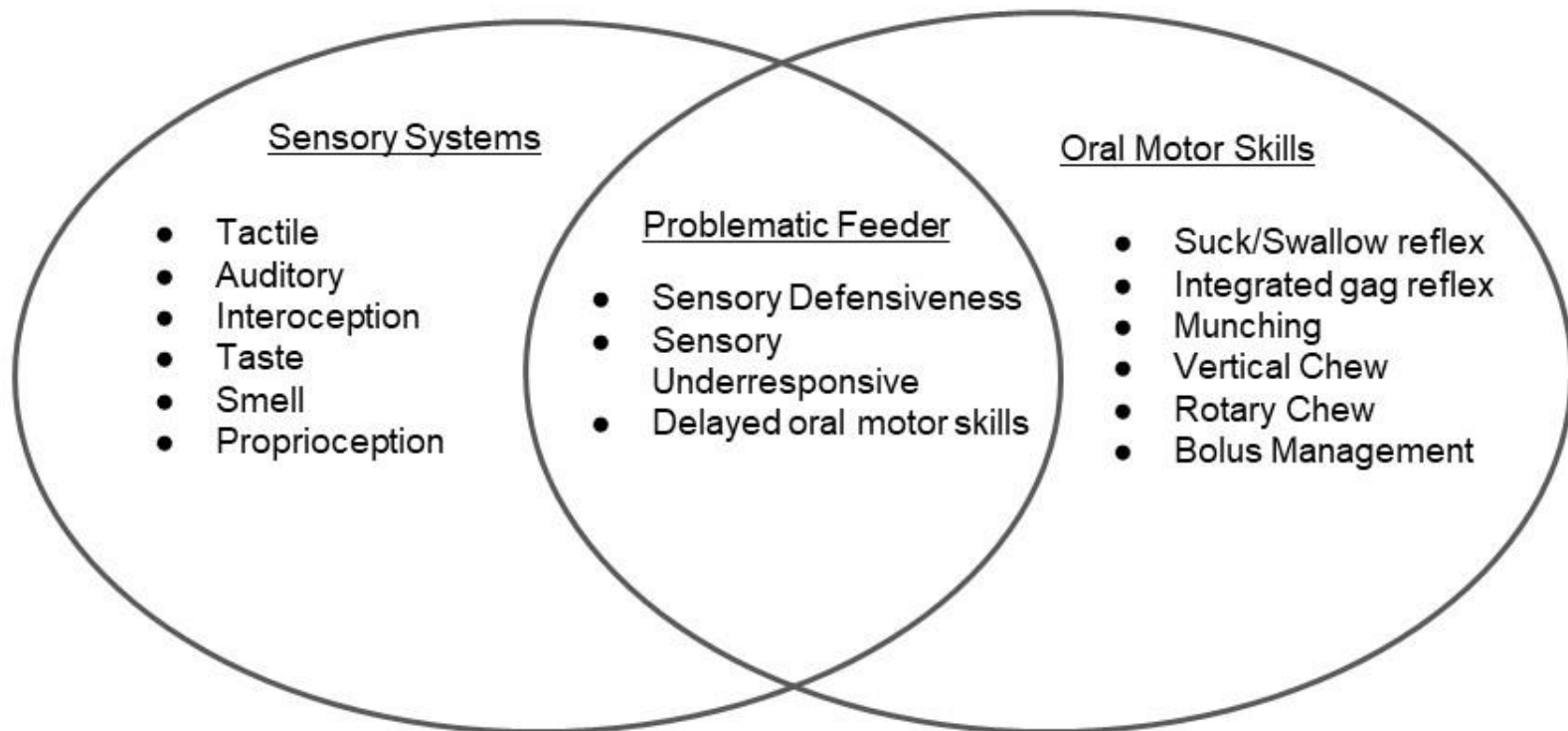
- Blowing air kisses
- Drinking through a straw
- Try thicker textures such as smoothie or milkshake through a straw
- Try different types of straw – starting with thicker and shorter and moving onto thinner, longer or even curly straws
- Hold a small piece of food eg carrot stick in between the teeth without using the hands
- Make silly faces in the mirror using the mouth
- Blow bubbles
- Hum tunes together
- Blow whistles or other musical instruments/noisemakers

Sensory

Hyposensitivity – reduced oral awareness. Can lead to stuffing too much food into the mouth. The child may drool and may also leave food particles in and around their mouth.

Hypersensitivity – too much oral awareness. The child may gag, vomit, spit the food out, turn away from the food, or resist by crying/kicking/screaming.

Problematic Feeder: Sensory or Oral Motor?



Top 10 Myths

1) Eating is the body's number 1 priority

Breathing is the first priority, postural stability second and eating comes third.

Ensure the child is seated at an appropriate height chair and table with the feet flat on the floor or a footrest/step. The hips, knees and ankles should be at 90 degrees.

The tray/table should fall midway between the belly button and nipples.

As the child grows you will need to make adjustments to ensure a good position is maintained.



Top 10 Myths

2) Eating is instinctive

Eating is only instinctive for the first month of life.

From birth to 3-4 months of age, primitive reflexes help us to eat.

Eating is a learned behaviour after 6 months of age.

Children learn to either eat, not eat or sort of eat.

Our job is to teach children the skills they need to eat efficiently.

Top 10 Myths

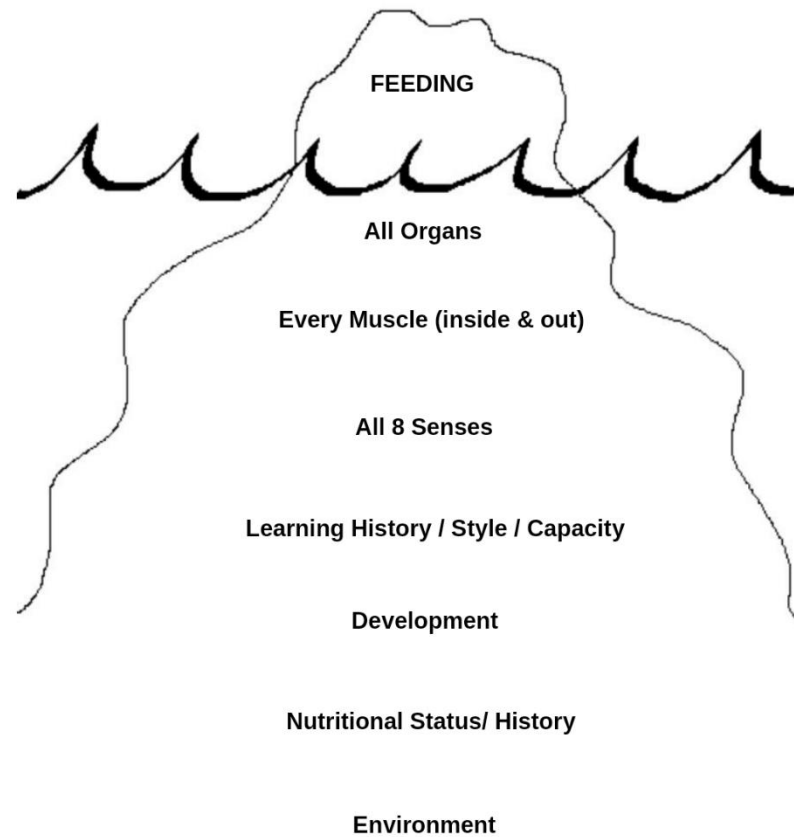
3) Eating is easy

Eating is the most complex task we engage in.

It requires every organ system, every muscle, and coordination of all 8 of our sensory systems.

Learning, development, nutrition and the environment also have to be integrated to help a child eat correctly.

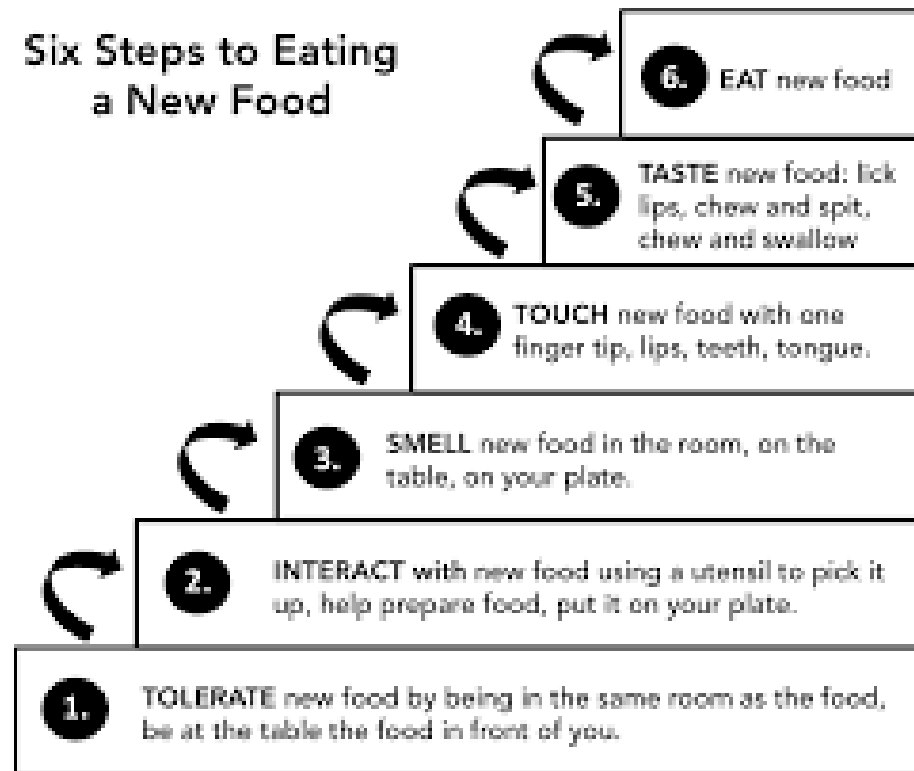
Feeding is the tip of the iceberg



Top 10 Myths

4) Eating is a 2 step process – you sit down and you eat

There are about 25 steps for typically developing children and about 32 steps or more for children with feeding problems.



Top 10 Myths

5) It is not appropriate to touch or play with your food

- Being messy is an important part of learning to eat.
- Children can learn a great deal about foods before they get into their mouth.
- Play with a purpose teaches a child the physics of the foods before they get into their mouth.
- Embrace the mess and do not rush in to wipe the child's hands/face before the end of the meal.



Messy Play Benefits



A Graded Approach to Messy Play

Level 1

Dry/hard textures such as:

Rice, pasta, sand, oats, brushes,
wood, sponges, metal objects

Level 2

Soft textures such as:

Playdough, dry finger paints, cotton
wool

Level 3

Wet textures such as:

Wet sand, paint, custard

Level 4

Slimy/lumpy textures such as:

Jelly, cornflour and water (gloop), baked
beans, wet oats, banana, shaving foam

Preparation for Messy Play

- Provide proprioceptive input before, during and after messy play.
- Try providing a firm hand massage prior to the activity.
- Press the palms of the hands firmly together.
- Lean onto hands on the table.



Engage Your Child in Messy Play Activities

- Grade contact through using Ziploc bags or Tupperware tubs to initially present the messy play item.
- Provide tools and utensils e.g. rolling pin, paint brushes, sponges, tongs
- Hide toys e.g. small characters or cars for the child to find
- Gradually introduce skin contact – get a small amount on the skin off a utensil, touch with fingertips, full fingers, whole hand and then both hands
- Include the feet once the child is happy to get their hands messy
- Progress onto feely bags
- Tap into the child's interests



Food Play Ideas



Top 10 Myths

6) If a child is hungry enough, they will eat. They will not starve themselves

Some children would actually starve themselves (inadvertently).

Some families may have been advised to 'starve out' the child,' This rarely works and can be very detrimental.

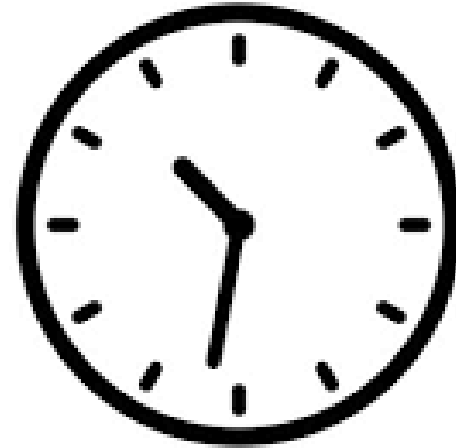


Top 10 Myths

7) Children only need to eat 3 times a day

Recommended schedule:

1. Breakfast
2. Morning snack
3. Lunch
4. Afternoon snack
5. Tea
6. Supper (optional)



Offer only water in between these meals/snacks.

Top 10 Myths

8) If a child wont eat, they either have a behaviour OR organic problem

65-95% of children with feeding problems have a combination of behavioural and organic problems.



Top 10 Myths

9) Certain foods are only to be eaten at certain times of the day

Food is just food

Avoid labelling foods as 'good' or 'bad'

'Junk' foods can often be stepping stones to eating a wider variety of foods as they are often easy to manage.



Top 10 Myths

10) Mealtimes are a proper social occasion. Children are to “mind their manners” at all meals.

Eating comes first, manners come second.

Mealtimes are a teaching opportunity, and we as parents are the teacher.

Children eat better when the food is engaging and interesting and when adults are modelling how to eat.



General Mealtime Strategies

Social Modelling: Teaching the Social Experience of Eating

1. Family meals
2. Model good feeding behaviours
3. Discuss food properties, varieties, preparation, preferences
4. Over-exaggerate biting, chewing and swallowing (discuss also)
5. Imitate child's eating
6. Child is not to be the focus of the meal
7. Meals are to be enjoyable and food is to be interesting
8. Do not criticize, yell or punish child
9. Child should be involved in all aspects of meal; preparation, serving oneself, clean up
10. Child needs to stay at the table for exposure to the social experience and food

General Mealtime Strategies

Structure Meal and Snacktimes

1. Use same place for meals
2. Follow approximately the same time schedule
3. Routine to meal; child helps prepare and serve, child is ignored or mildly reinforced for first 10-20 minutes of the meal, program is implemented, child helps clean up
4. Present foods in small, easily chewable bites that can be finger fed if needed
5. Present only 3 foods on the child's plate at any one time
6. Each food amount should be approximately 1 tablespoon per 1 year of age
7. At least one preferred food at every meal
8. Several foods should be on the table for exposure
9. Limit snacks to 15 minutes and meals to 30 minutes
10. Allow spitting/vomiting into chosen containers only

General Mealtime Strategies

Reinforcement

1. Verbal praise in the appropriate amounts works best
2. Create a play program outside of meals if parent has a low reinforcement value
3. Reinforce siblings' appropriate eating
4. Reinforce child for ANY positive food behaviour
5. Touching and playing with food desensitizes child
6. ONLY very carefully. use preferred food as reinforcers
7. IF have to use an object reinforcer – make sure it disappears quickly to motivate to continue

General Mealtime Strategies

Accessing the Cognitive

1. Allow crushing of the foods with the fingers and talk about how this is just what your teeth do to the food in your mouth (ie. crush up the foods into powder that then dissolves in your spit)
2. Use mini-choppers and talk about how it has teeth just like yours, and proceed to show and talk about how the mini-chopper works (have child use the chopper)
3. When brushing teeth, count the back molars (upper and lower) as “molar 1, molar 2, molar 3”. During meals, verbally cue child to put foods back onto their molars 1-3
4. Watch videos such as “Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree” and talk about Pooh’s tummy as rumbling as “his tummy is talking to him”. “It is saying he is hungry. He needs to go eat”. Also do this if you hear your own or your child’s stomach rumbling. Make sure after eating that you emphasize how your “tummy feels so much better and is telling you its’ happy because it ate some food”.

Family Meals

The goal of Family Meals is for your Child to eat a volume of their preferred foods. However, a secondary goal is for your Child to be learning about other, non-preferred or new foods as well. Therefore, at EVERY meal AND snack, your Child should be offered at least one protein, one starch and one fruit/vegetable. AND at least one of these foods must be a preferred/safe food. Do NOT restrict access to preferred foods until your therapist indicates that your child has enough feeding skills for you to do so.



How to Prepare a Family Meal/Snack

There are three kinds of foods to serve at EVERY meal AND snack:

Protein – e.g. Meat, fish, soy, nuts, dairy, dark beans, legumes

Starch – e.g. Bread, noodles, rice, crackers, cereal, cakes, cookies, potatoes, corn

Fruit/Vegetable – e.g. Apples, oranges, bananas, berries, melon, carrot, green beans, broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber

Serve at least 1 of each type of food at EVERY meal and snack.

At least one food at each meal/snack should be a safe/preferred food that the child will consistently eat.

Serve the preferred food along with the foods the rest of the family are eating.

Make one large meal that includes everyone's foods – no extra cooking.

Family Meals Structure

STEP 1 = give a verbal warning, “we will be eating in 5 minutes”.

STEP 2 = tell the child “it is time to WASH HANDS now” (not “it is time to eat”)

STEP 3 = bring child to sink to wash hands (change the soap, washcloth or sponge and water temperature etc. every other day for Sensory Preparation)

STEP 4 = bring to the table to sit down (can have one preferred food already out on the table if needed to entice child into their seat)

STEP 5 = begin Family Style serving (each person passes each food and takes a small amount to put on their plate or the “Learning Plate”; Rule of Thumb re: serving size = 1 tablespoon per year of age)

STEP 6 = everyone eats, allowing your child to self-feed for at least the first 10 minutes of the meal. Adults are to talk about the food and use over-exaggerated oral-motor movements to “show and tell” the child about how to make the food work in the mouth.

Family Meals Structure

STEP 7 = after at least 10-20 minutes, begin any special feeding programs or adult feeding of your child

STEP 8 = when child appears to be done eating, offer a drink in a cup (can offer after the ½ way point in the meal if needs a drink sooner). Can try to re-offer a food after the drink, if Child appears to not have eaten enough at the meal. Do this in a playful manner; don't push.

STEP 9 = when done eating and drinking, begin a “Clean Up” routine = Child blows or throws 1 piece of each food offered at that meal into the trash or a scraps bowl, then washes hands and/or table BEFORE getting down from the table.

If Child tries to get down too early, remind him/her “we haven't done Clean Up yet. It's not time to get down”, and then offer another food. Don't forget to use your “Key Phrases”.

Key Phrases

Talk about what the food is like SAY “this is a circle food with a big smell,” try not to use “potty” talk (gross, gooey, smelly)

Avoid asking questions (can you?), instead **SAY** “YOU CAN_____”

Learning about. It takes 10 times to eat a food to know if you like it or not. **SAY** “You are still LEARNING about it”

Keep talk at the table happy and calm.

Division of Responsibility

Parents Jobs

- Choose and prepare the food.
- Provide regular meals and snacks.
- Make eating times pleasant.
- Step-by-step, show children by example how to behave at family mealtime.
- Be considerate of children's lack of food experience without catering to likes and dislikes.
- Not let children have food or beverages (except for water) between meal and snack times.
- Let children grow up to get bodies that are right for them.

Child's Jobs

- Children will eat.
- They will eat the amount they need.
- They will learn to eat the food their parents eat.
- They will grow predictably.
- They will learn to behave well at mealtime.

Division of Responsibility

- 1. Give up your power!**
- 2. Stay in control of the shopping and cooking**
- 3. Don't give a running commentary at mealtimes**
- 4. Don't tell them what they like and dislike**

Cues to Eating

We learn to do things depending on the environment we are in.

For a child who isn't eating well, the home and possibly even the parents have become signals to not eat.

We need to change the physical signals or the child will continue to eat in the same way.

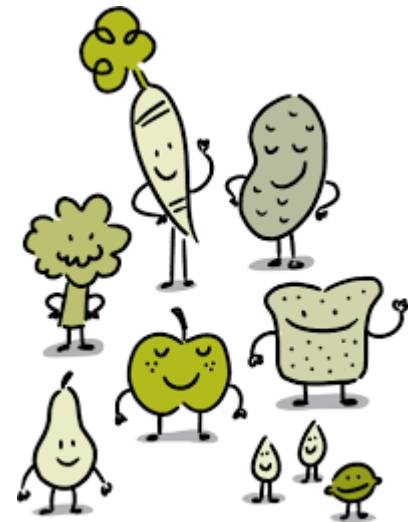
Changes may include changing:

- The seating
- The position at the table
- Use of plain placemats

Only change 1-2 cues at a time.

Building a Healthy Lifelong Relationship with Food

1. Don't use pudding as a reward or punishment
2. Don't push them to eat everything on their plate
3. Don't tell them to eat anything – let alone make them!
4. Keep their diet as savoury as possible
5. Don't buy into the idea of 'children's food'
6. Don't hide the vegetables



Building a Healthy Lifelong Relationship with Food

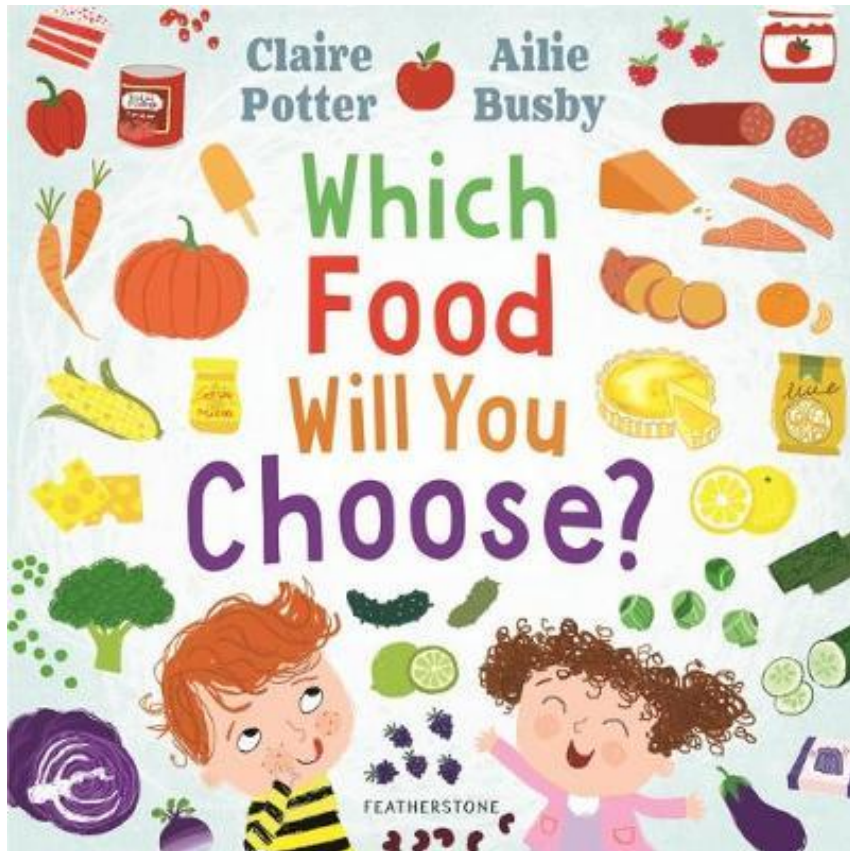
7. **Ban words like ‘yuck’, ‘eugh’, ‘I don’t like this’ and ‘I don’t want that’**
8. **Go easy on the praise**
9. **Have a sweets day once a week and stick to it**
10. **Offer the vegetables first**
11. **Don’t use food as emotional comfort**
12. **Be a good role model**
13. **Stick to ‘real’ food**



Make Mealtimes Enjoyable

- 1. Relax about table manners**
- 2. Let them eat at their own pace**
- 3. Make the dinner table a happy, relaxed, 'together' place to be**
- 4. Involve them in the cooking, even if it is a hassle!**
- 5. Have fun and adventures with food**
- 6. Be patient, be consistent**

Supermarket Trips



- Set the child a challenge to choose 3 foods of a specific colour or type.
- Work with the foods together at home, without pressure to try them.
- For older children, challenge them to find recipes that include each item.

Fun in the Kitchen

- Even very young children can be involved in meal prep. Consider appropriate tasks they can help with such as washing or scrubbing produce
- Children can often be more willing to try foods during the preparation process away from the pressure of the meal table. Allow them to if it is safe to do so.
- Think about where to complete tasks so the child can see what is happening and be involved – e.g. a breakfast bar or worktop may be too high for them to safely help. Try bringing food prep to them – at the dining table for example
- Consider the tools and utensils you are using e.g. provide smaller utensils where appropriate to fit little hands
- Adapt tasks to make them more manageable eg halve a mixture for them to stir if it is too stiff for them to manage
- Use catchphrases to remind them how to complete tasks and make it fun
- Talk to the child about the sensory qualities of the foods – smell, colour, texture, taste etc
- Always be mindful of safety and consider ways to ensure this e.g. no cut gloves

Tips to Teach Use of a Spoon

- Model the use of a spoon and allow the child to try from themselves. Don't worry about the mess!
- Use a small mirror
- Hand over (or under) hand assistance
- Choose cutlery which is easy and comfortable to hold depending on the child's age and ability

Consider:

- Material the spoon is made from (silicone, plastic, metal etc)
- Shape and diameter of handle
- Depth of spoon head
- Angle of spoon head

Progression to Cup Drinking – Skip the Sippy Cup!

Potential Problems:

- Tooth Decay
- Lack of hunger pangs
- Oral motor delays



Progression to Cup Drinking – Step 1 (One Way Straw)

The easiest drinking utensil is a flexible straw in a closed container, a straw bottle.

While the caregiver controls the amount of liquid coming into the mouth, the child needs the following:

1. Internal jaw stability and strength to close the jaw appropriately
2. Tongue lifting to the roof of the mouth to initiate the swallow
3. Control of the liquid as it comes into the mouth
4. Coordination of sucking, swallowing, and breathing



Progression to Cup Drinking – Step 2 (Regular Straw)

To drink independently from a regular straw in an open container, like a cup, your child needs to have a bit more control:

1. Head/Neck control
2. Internal jaw stability and strength to close the jaw appropriately
3. Lip strength to maintain lip seal around the straw
4. Lip rounding and negative pressure to pull the liquid into the mouth
5. Tongue lifting to the roof of the mouth to initiate the swallow
6. Control of the liquid as it comes into the mouth
7. Coordination of sucking, swallowing, and breathing
8. Eye-hand coordination

A shorter, wider straw will be easier to start with.

Thicker liquids are harder so start with thin liquids such as water.



Progression to Cup Drinking – Step 3 (Open Cup)

To drink independently from a regular cup, your child needs:

1. Head/neck control
2. Internal jaw stability and strength to close the jaw appropriately
3. Lip strength to maintain lip seal on the cup rim
4. Lip rounding and negative pressure to pull the liquid into the mouth
5. Tongue lifting to the roof of the mouth to initiate the swallow
6. Control of the liquid as it comes into the mouth
7. Coordination of sucking, swallowing, and breathing
8. Eye-hand coordination



Tips to Teach Chewing

- Oral motor exercises
- Use a mirror so the child can see how their mouth moves
- Try using food picks to place small pieces of food directly on the back teeth for chewing



- Create a 'chew bin' with different stick shapes textured chews
 - Using these regularly can help to desensitise the mouth and reduce the gag reflex (moving it to the back of the mouth)
 - Gnaw the object on the back teeth
 - Rub it on the tongue
 - Tap and 'brush' the teeth
 - Hold it in between the teeth without using hands

Tips to Teach Swallowing

- Ensure the child has adequate chewing skills first
- Practise chewing and swallowing very small pieces of food first before moving onto larger pieces
- Model swallowing to the child using over exaggerated actions
- Try removing the skin from eg tomatoes/grapes etc to make them easier to swallow
- Have a drink close by

Reducing Screen Time During Meals

If you have fallen into this habit, it can be tricky to get out of. Be patient as it may take time to be able to remove screens altogether.

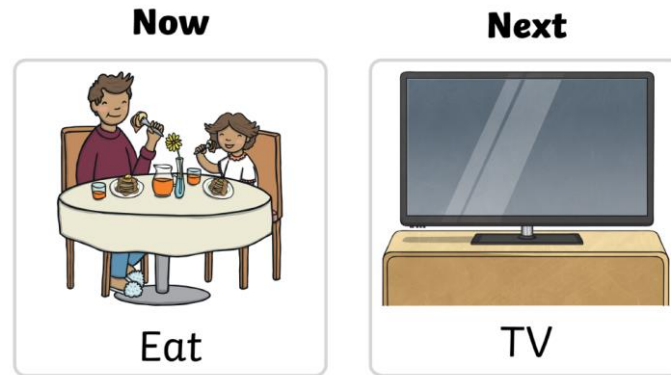
Progress with caution to avoid the risk of your child stopping eating.

Use a visual timer to show your child how long until the screen goes off. Use a longer duration initially and then gradually reduce this.

Try moving the child and device further away from each other. E.g. if they have a tablet on the table, place it further back, propped on another piece of furniture. Or move the child further away from the TV.

Reducing Screen Time During Meals

Try using Now and next symbols



Most importantly, sit down with your child to eat. If this is a problem, sit further away and over time gradually move closer.

Talk to your child during the meal but without too many questions as they will have to stop eating to answer.

Keeping the Child at the Table and Engaged

- Try and build in a movement activity prior to meal times
- Follow a consistent routine and be clear with expectations
- Expect resistance initially if the child is not used to coming to the table
- Increase length of time at the table gradually. Use visual timers and symbols if needed
- Use phrases such as ‘we stay at the table until everyone is finished’
- Make meal times enjoyable and reduce pressure so the child wants to stay at the table
- Depending on the age and cognitive ability of the child, conversation starters can help to keep them engaged

Food Jags

Offer the same food only every other day, not everyday.

If the child does not have enough range in their diet to be able to alternate, you need to gradually make changes to the food to prevent jaggging. Start by changing the shape – cut it differently or use cookie cutters. Allow the child to do this themselves initially.

Move on to change the colour, taste and finally texture.

Don't Lose Trust

Avoid 'tricking' the child into trying foods by hiding them in preferred foods.

This will cause them to lose trust in you and may well stop them eating the preferred food.

Do not hide a different brand in their preferred brand container to trick them into accepting another brand.

Try to avoid hiding medication in preferred foods and drinks if possible as it will alter the taste and may put them off in future.

Vitamins




Introducing New Foods

- 1. Keep offering them the foods they don't eat**
- 2. Keep preferences as preferences**
- 3. Never stop them trying something unusual or different**



My Foods Library – myfoodslibrary.com

SEARCH FOOD LIBRARY

NAME 

CONTAINS

COLOR

TEXTURE

SHAPE

SEARCH RESULT

NAME	CONTAIN	COLOR	TEXTURE	SHAPE	ACTION
Asparagus (steamed)	Vegetable	Green	Soft	Stick	<input type="button" value="SAVE"/>
Baby kale	Vegetable	Green	Soft	Other	<input type="button" value="SAVE"/>
Baby spinach	Vegetable	Green	Soft	Other	<input type="button" value="SAVE"/>
Basil	Vegetable	Green	Soft	Other	<input type="button" value="SAVE"/>

Exploring New Foods Using the Senses – daniellebinns.com

Superpower Foods

SCIENTIST

Child's Name _____

RATE APPEARANCE

Size **BIG** MEDIUM small

Shape ?

Colour

Draw or Place Food Here!

RATE SMELL

BIG SMELL

MEDIUM SMELL

SMALL SMELL

RATE TEXTURE

Soft Hard

Warm Cold

Wet Dry

Smooth Bumpy

GIVE FOOD A NAME

i.e. Brainy Broccoli

I like it today

I might like it tomorrow

RATE TASTE

Salty Sweet

Spicy Bread-y

Plant-y Sour

Meat-y Cheesy

To reorder visit: DANIELLEBINNS.COM/PLACEMAT © 2018 Danielle Binns Nutrition

Superpower Foods

SCIENTIST TRACKING SHEET

FRUIT

PROTEIN

VEGGIES

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Picky Eater Food Guide



How to Help Your Child Learn to Eat Mushrooms

🕒 August 24, 2021



How to Help Your Child Learn to Eat Turkey

🕒 August 20, 2021



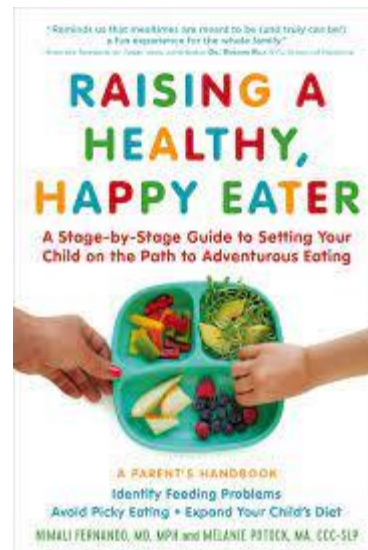
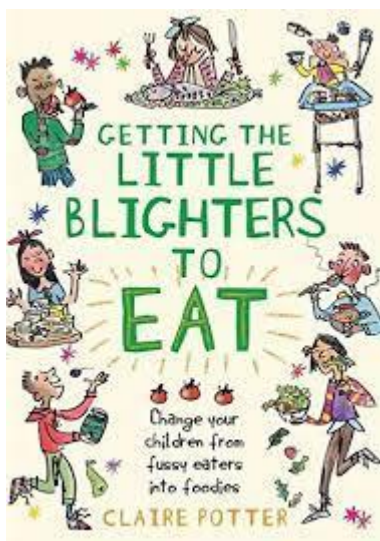
How to Help Your Child Learn to Eat Brussels Sprouts

🕒 August 20, 2021

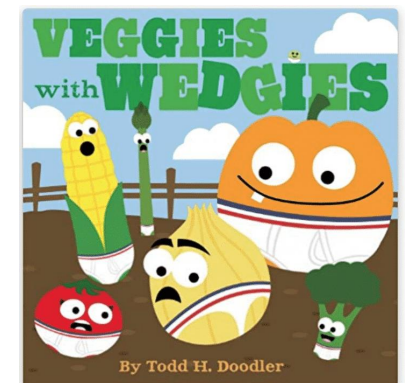
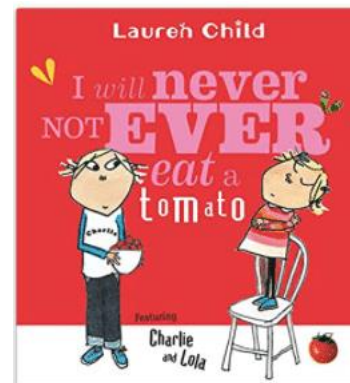
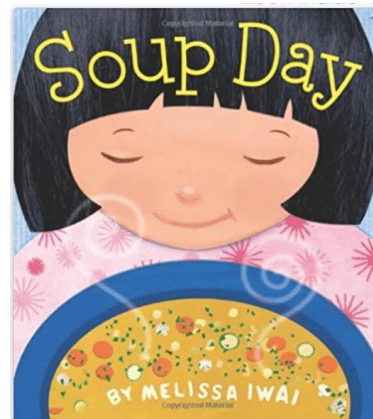
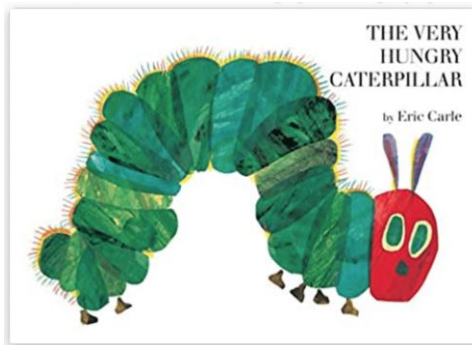
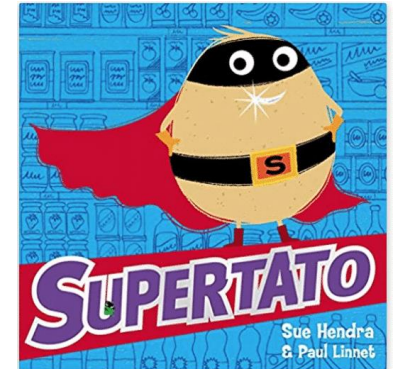
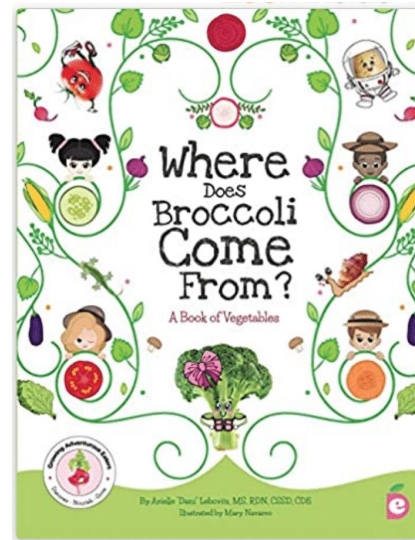
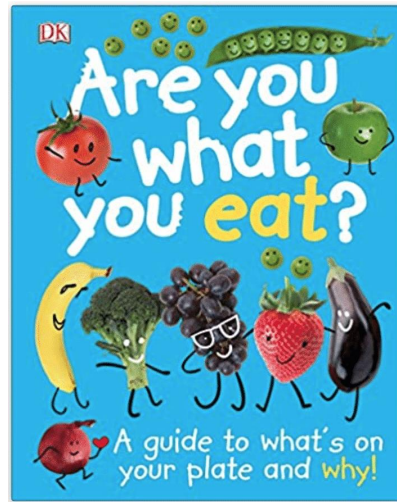
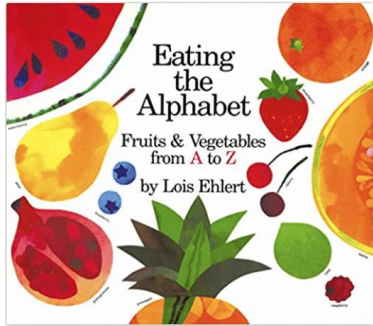
Books and Resources for Parents/Carers/Professionals

<https://sosapproachtofeeding.com/>

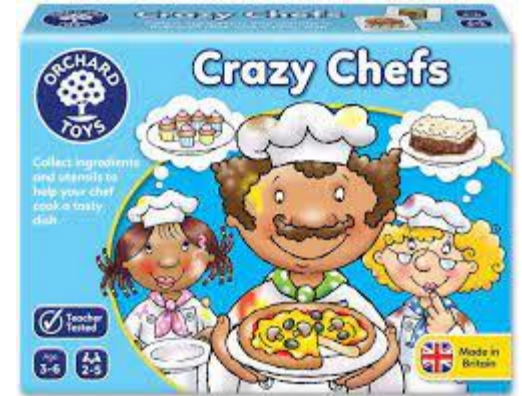
<https://www.feedingmatters.org/>



Books and Resources for Children and Young People



Other Food Themed Play Ideas (Non Edible)



Summary

Helping a child through feeding problems can be a long process. It's a marathon - not a sprint. So hang in there!

Remember these key messages:

- Remove all pressure
- Swallowing food isn't the only goal
- Eat together
- Set a routine
- Help your child to build a healthy relationship with food
- Keep offering foods again and again

Questions

Thank you
for listening

