

GENERAL FEEDING STRATEGIES

EDUCATIONAL HANDOUT

If you have a child who is a picky eater or has sensory processing issues that impact their diet, these are some general feeding strategies that can help you support them and set them up for success at home. These simple and easy-to-follow strategies can make a big difference for both you and your child. By implementing these strategies, you can provide the support your child needs.

Create Positive Experiences

1



- Create positive associations with foods.
 - Resist using negative words. For example, "ew," "icky," or "gross."
 - Use neutral language with foods by describing the food by its texture. For example: "That felt a little squishy, huh?"
- Encourage positive interactions with various foods using all five senses: touch, sight, smell, hear, and taste.
- Be calm and supportive.
- Never force your child to eat.
- Do not consider manners during meals.
 - For example, if your child doesn't eat by mouth, show them what their teeth and tongue can do with the foods.

Meal Preparation

2

- Have your child assist with meal preparations.
 - You and your child use bare hands and/or minimal tools during meal preparations.
- Offer your child to be in the kitchen or the same room while cooking or preparing meals.
- Encourage your child to sample the ingredients if they would like to.



Tactile/Food Play

3



- Tactile/food play should take place away from your child's typical mealtime setting to avoid them from feeling pressured to eat the food.
- Use foods you would like your child to eventually learn to eat.
- Use foods in colorful and fun containers, while also presenting foods with different colors, shapes, sizes, and textures.
- Encourage your child to play with new foods for texture play.
- Use various foods and non-food textures to encourage your child to touch and try new foods and textures to make the experience less intimidating.
- Some tactile/food play activities are:
 - Finger painting or using paint brushes to paint with food.
 - Touch wet foods through ziploc bags.
 - Count foods.
 - Use foods to create funny faces or images on plates or food mat.
 - Stack foods to create a tower.
 - Shake and stir foods to a song.

Family Mealtimes

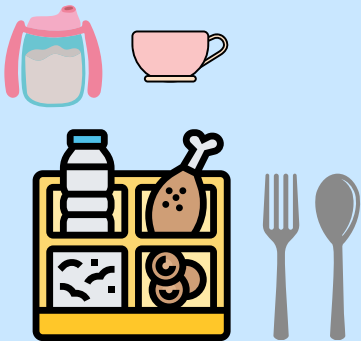
- Try having at least one family meal per day around the same time every day.
- Model eating foods during mealtime where you may explain what you are doing during mealtimes.
 - For example, you bite into the food.
- Your child does not have to eat or have the same meal as family members.
 - However, place some of the family meals on their plate or a plate near them while not placing demands for them to try them. This will give them control over what and how much they may eat.
- Create positive routines to start and end meals.
 - For example, start a meal with a fun song while washing hands and end it by kissing the food "goodbye."
- Start mealtime slowly without pressure to eat, but allow the child to explore the foods under your supervision.
- Keep a consistent place in the home to have meals.
- Have your child sit during meals or stand by the table.
 - Avoid allowing your child roam and walk off between bites of food.
 - When your child is sitting, make sure that they are sitting in a proper sitting position where they are sitting with their hips, knees, and ankles all bent at 90 degrees. Their feet should also be supported rather than "dangling."
- Have your child help serve the food by having them place food onto each family member's plates.
- Have your child help with cleaning up the foods.
 - For example, throw food in the trash and giving you the "dirty" plates or eating utensils.

4



Food Presentation

- Food Presentation
- Use preferred age-appropriate eating utensils and cups.
- Have your child explore eating utensils and food tools with foods.
- Try using a muffin tray or sectional plates to provide multiple food choices.
- Cut food into different shapes or fun characters so that it would look more appealing and fun to your child.
- Use transparent bottles or cups so your child can see what is inside.
 - Do not hide what you feed them; they may lose trust in you and/or the food.



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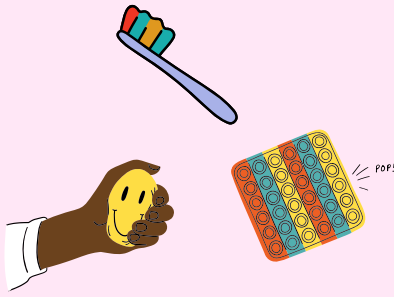
Offering Options

- Give your child options between two healthy snacks.
 - One option can be a new snack, and the other may be their safe or semi-preferred food, so they control whether they want to try new foods.
- Do small changes to foods they like.
 - For example, cook carrots differently by steaming them, cutting them into different shapes, or being slightly seasoned.
- Introduce new foods during snack time.



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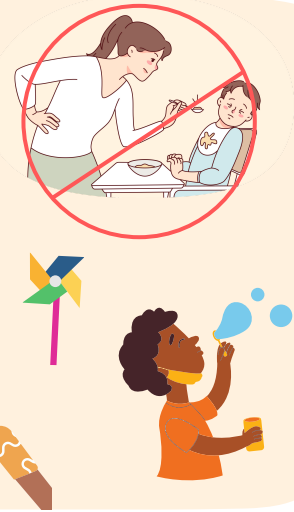
Addressing Sensory Needs

- Address sensory needs before eating so your child is aware of the expectations and is regulated.
- Keep regulation tools close by when possible to help your child self-regulate.
 - Self-regulation is important before completing challenging food activities.

General Tips

8

- Allow your child to assist with grocery shopping.
 - For example, offer them to help with creating the grocery list.
- Change up the brands of their snacks.
 - For example, if your child likes Ritz crackers, expose them to off-brands.
- Watch food videos with your child.
- Do not force feed your child as it can lead to them having a negative association with food and not trust you with feeding.
- Offer oral motor toys.
 - For example, bubbles, straws, windmills, party blowers, or chew toys are great tools to help your child warm up and stimulate their mouth muscles.



For more information or concerns about your child's s feeding needs, please consult your child's occupational therapist or contact your pediatrician. You may also refer to www.aota.org for additional information.

References

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