

## Session 1: Nurturing Through Physical Routines

### Children's Healthy Eating



Healthy eating concerns us all. Here are a few common questions and answers about children's eating to help make mealtime a positive experience.

#### **How can I make sure a fussy eater eats enough of the right things?**

For some children, fussy eating is a normal part of growing up, particularly from 18 months to five years. Most children have definite likes and dislikes. Some may refuse to eat all but one or two foods for awhile. Take a calm, easy-going approach to these behaviours to avoid mealtime becoming a source of negative attention.

Serve a variety of fresh food that is attractively presented. Try interesting shapes and finger foods. Ensure that children are hungry at mealtimes. Allow children to take their time, but set a reasonable time limit.

Keep serving portions small; children can be intimidated by large amounts. Make sure eating is associated with success (I ate a whole carrot!) rather than failure. Never pressure a child to eat. Don't use food, beverages, and desserts as bribes or punishments.

Offer children plenty of choices. Carrots or peas? Ketchup on or beside? Sit next to Mom or Dad? Use large serving dishes so children can serve themselves. Even toddlers love to pour their own beverages (from a small pitcher). Allow children to feed themselves as much as they can—with or without utensils!

Involve children in menu planning and food preparation. Offer nutrient-packed fruits: kiwi, cantaloupe, berries, peaches, apricots, pears, and oranges. Mince vegetables and add them to such things as spaghetti sauces, burgers, muffins, and breads.

If a child does not appear to be healthy and growing normally, discuss your concerns with a physician.

#### **Should I encourage an obese child to lose weight?**

Research shows that the longer a child remains obese, the more likely the child will become an obese adult. But children come in all shapes and sizes. Focus on healthy eating and exercise habits. Build self-esteem around being active.

Offer a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, and whole grain foods. Fat is an important energy source for children. Lower fat, but not low fat, meats and dairy products can be served. Use margarine, butter, mayonnaise, and salad dressing sparingly.

Encourage regular physical activity, appropriate to a child's age and ability. Don't use food as a reward. Try stickers or a big hug instead.

Consult a physician or dietician about weight loss for an obese child.

### **What can I do about a child who rejects new foods?**

Introduce new foods, one at a time, when a child is most hungry. Encourage your child to experience food using all five senses. Make games of trying new foods.

Establish the "one bite" rule for new foods. Let children know it is okay to not like something, but that it is important to try it before making up their minds. Praise a child who takes that bite!

Follow the one bite rule yourself. Be a positive model. Be honest if you don't care for something and explain your reasons.

### **How can I help make mealtime a more pleasant experience?**

For a child, food is something to explore, enjoy, and share with others. Sing songs together. Share stories about your day. Play games like "I Spy." Compare the smell, feel, look, and taste of different foods.

Children love to master new skills and take charge! Assign duties like setting and clearing the table and helping to pass the food.

Encourage and praise children for saying "please" and "thank you." Establish guidelines such as hats off at the table, chew with your mouth closed, and talk with your mouth empty. These will make mealtime more pleasant for everyone.

Bon appetit!

## **References**

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