



FEEDING TIME

MORE THAN JUST FOOD

Feeding is more than just eating. It's one of the richest times for learning, connection, and communication.

These tips are here to help you understand all the great things you are doing everyday

COMMUNICATION

- Use simple words or phrases to talk about food: (“Yummy!” “No thank you.” “Yuck!” “So sweet!”)
- Honor your child’s communication attempts.
 - Turning their head away or pushing food away is communication.
 - Provide words for them (“No thank you” or “I don’t like that”) and remove the food. You can always try again later.
- Using gestures or signs along with words (such as more, eat, water, or please) helps support language development.

Once your child can reach, point, or look toward an option, choices are a powerful communication tool.

- Offer two simple options (“egg or water”) and label their choice (“You want water!”)

Social Skills

Meals are a shared experience — not just a task.

Learning Through Modeling & Connection

- Take turns eating with your child (they take a bite, you take a bite)
 - This builds patience, imitation, & early social skills.
- Let your child watch you chew, drink, and enjoy food.
 - Exaggerating chewing or bringing the fork to your mouth can help them learn.

Children learn best through relationship and shared experience.

Motor Skills

Using different methods of eating supports fine motor skills, coordination, independence, and confidence.

Use **multiple methods within the same meal**:

- Feeding your child with a spoon, fork or fingers if needed
- Letting your child self-feed with their hands
- Offering a loaded spoon or fork for them to self-feed
- Allowing exploration with utensils even without food

This helps children learn how to:

- pick *up* food (raking → pincer grasp; using utensils)
- transfer food *to* their mouth
- successfully get food *into* their mouth

It's okay to get messy, AND also okay to want more food in your child's belly than on the floor. Use a variety of these tips to get it all in!

Sensory Skills

Eating is a sensory experience long before food reaches the mouth.

Children take in information by:

- **looking** at food, **touching**, **squeezing**, **poking** food, **smelling** it, noticing **texture**, **weight**, & **temperature**

This helps them feel safe and prepared for what's coming.

Presentation Matters

- A familiar food may feel unfamiliar on a new plate, spoon, or utensil.
- Pausing, pulling back, or inspecting food is normal and healthy. This means your child is processing and categorizing. Give them time to inspect it and decide what they think.

Be Flexible

Everyday— and every meal— can look different.

- Preferences change, sometimes daily
- Real food naturally varies in taste and texture
 - one blueberry may be sweet, another tart
 - one carrot may be soft, another firm
- A child may love a food one day and refuse it the next

This is a **NORMAL** part of sensory learning and choice-making.

It's also okay if:

- Some meals include toys to aid in feeding skills and others days toys are distracting
- Some days include new foods and textures and presentations and others days are on repeats.

There is no perfect meal — just opportunities to learn.

Remember

HAVE FUN! & ENJOY the moments

Feeding time should feel **safe** and **pleasant**, not stressful.

- High energy or calm and quiet — both are okay
- If a meal isn't working, it's okay to:
 - pause, switch things up, or try again later

Connection, safety, and trust matter more than how much was eaten.

If feeding feels stressful or overwhelming, you're not alone. Support can help — and early guidance can make a big difference.