

10 Tips for Avoiding Food Fights and Eating Problems

by Dr Janice Woolley

Be a good role model. You have probably noticed how your child likes to imitate you and other adults. Scary isn't it! For his benefit as well as your own, be sure you eat well and are physically active. Don't talk about dieting or concerns about your weight in your child's presence.

Respect your child's appetite. Your job is to provide nutritious food, her job is to decide how much to eat. She needs to learn to recognize her body's signals of hunger and satiety. Never force or coerce a child to eat. Also, don't praise her for eating a lot. Unlike most adults, children are naturally sensitive to appetite and will even stop in the middle of eating a favorite food if they get full. This is something to encourage. It's better to throw away uneaten food than to deal with a lifelong eating or weight problem.

Be patient when trying new foods. Your child may need to try a new food ten times or more before accepting it. Don't be surprised if she tastes a bite and removes it from her mouth. Offer the food again at a later time. Let her see you eating and enjoying the food. You can also try a new food when she is most hungry. Children are sensitive to strong flavors. Broccoli, for example, may taste bitter to her. Don't worry, most adults like foods that they hated as kids. When a new food is presented a child may need to touch it and may approach it cautiously. How do you react to new foods? Do you dig right in or do you smell the food and take a tiny taste first? A child has less experience with foods so may not be able to tell just by the appearance or the smell of the food whether he is likely to enjoy it.

Start with small servings. Try letting your child dish up his own food when practical. If you need to dish it up give him a small amount initially. He can always ask for more. A big serving may look overwhelming to him.

Don't worry about "food jags". If your child insists on peanut butter every night, allow him to have it as well as offering what you are preparing. He will soon tire of it and make other choices. But, don't be a short order cook. Don't cook a separate meal for your child if he doesn't like what is being served.

Let him help you in the kitchen. Young children love to help with cooking and may be more likely to try something they help to prepare. Many of our recipes are designed to be prepared with your child's help.

Set behavior limits. Don't allow whining, playing with food or other bad behavior at the table. Have her leave the table until she decides to come back and eat without misbehaving.

Establish regular meal times and snack times. Limit snacks to two or three times a day. Children who "graze" constantly may not be hungry at mealtimes. Don't allow toddlers to carry a bottle or juice cup around all day, or to go to bed with one.

Food should be used primarily for hunger and not for comfort or reward. Use physical contact, hugs and kisses, instead of food to comfort your child. Be sparing in using food as rewards. Try praise, sticker charts, special time with a parent, and other rewards first. Reserve food rewards for infrequent situations. Don't use food as a way to keep a child entertained or quiet, provide toys instead.

Meals should be sociable occasions. Eat together as a family whenever possible. If dinnertime is late because of parent's work schedules, it may work best to feed young children early and let them join you at the table for a snack. Turn the TV off while you eat.

Courtesy of Food for Tots. <http://foodfortots.com>

© Food for Tots Publishing 1999-2001. All Rights reserved.

Permission granted to reproduce in part or in full for noncommercial use only, provided this disclaimer is included.