

My Food Explorer Wheel!

A fun way to explore new foods together

Exploring new foods can be fun!



Draw or color a food in each slice, then flip the page to learn how to play!

How to Play

Step 1: Your child draws or colors a food in **4 of the 5 slices** — foods they already like, foods they are curious about, or a mix!

Step 2: A parent picks **1 non-preferred food** for the remaining slice. Your child **draws this food on the wheel too** — this is a **mental warm-up** (see below)!

Step 3: At mealtime, your child **spins or points** to choose **2 foods**. The **1 non-preferred food** also goes on the plate as the gentle 'stretch' food. **A parent also puts some of the stretch food on their own plate** — this normalizes trying new foods and encourages exploration through imitation.

Step 4: Your child now has **3 foods on their plate**: 2 they chose + 1 stretch food. Celebrate ANY interaction — looking, touching, smelling, licking, or tasting all count!

Step 5: At the end of the meal, your child can **throw the non-preferred food in the garbage themselves**. This is a positive, empowering way to end the meal — it increases one more interaction with the food (picking it up, carrying it) while keeping the experience low-pressure and giving your child control over the ending.

Why Does Your Child Draw the Non-Preferred Food?

Drawing the stretch food on the wheel is a **mental warm-up** — the very first step in your child's brain getting comfortable with a food **before it ever reaches the plate**. When your child draws or colors the non-preferred food, their brain is already processing it: thinking about its shape, its color, what it looks like. This activates the same neural pathways involved in food acceptance — without any pressure or anxiety.

Think of it like this: if a child is afraid of dogs, you would not start by putting a dog in their lap. You would start by **looking at pictures of dogs, drawing dogs, talking about dogs** — building familiarity from a safe distance. Drawing the food works the same way. Seeing the non-preferred food drawn **alongside their favorite foods** also creates a powerful mental shift: it becomes **"one of the foods on MY wheel"** rather than "that scary food."

Choosing the Stretch Food: Pick a food your child will **at least tolerate on their plate**, even if they do not eat it yet. A small win (tolerating it, touching it) builds confidence. Over time, stretch foods can graduate to preferred foods!

Sensory Exploration Prompts

Try these **"you can"** prompts during mealtime to keep exploration inviting, not directing:

Look: "You can look at it — what color is it?"

Touch: "You can touch it — is it bumpy or smooth?"

Smell: "You can smell it — what does it smell like?"

Listen: "You can squeeze it — does it crunch or squish?"

Taste: "You can put it on your lips if you want!"

Tips for Success

- * **Tiny portions** — pea-sized is enough!
- * **One new food at a time** alongside favorites.
- * **Parent eats the stretch food too** — modeling is powerful!
- * **"You can" language** — invite, do not direct.
- * **No pressure** — never force. All exploration counts.
- * **Repeat exposure** — 15-30+ tries is normal.
- * **End positively** — child throws stretch food in the garbage themselves!

Remember: The goal is **exploration, not consumption**. Every interaction with a new food — drawing it, looking at it, touching it, or throwing it in the garbage at the end — builds comfort and familiarity. Celebrate every small step!