

Lunch at Children's House



We often hear from parents how different their child behaves at the lunch table at school to the dinner table at home. If you are feeling some frustration over manners or picky eating at home here are our guidelines that you can incorporate into your home.

NOTE: These are guidelines of the expectations we hold at school. School can be a very controlled environment and peer pressure is incredibly effective with the pickiest of eaters. If trying to bring any of this into your home feels overwhelming at this time - take a breath. And maybe read the article on homeschooling in our links and resources tab that states “first step: relax.” None of this is permanent and we look forward to the time we sit around the lunch table with your child again.

ADDITIONAL NOTE: Another way to think about instating these expectations in your household is “Hard-Easy”. If you put the energy and effort in the beginning to holding these expectations it may be very hard for a little while but once your child understands the boundaries they will relax into them and it will be easier for a lot longer than it was hard. It may be hard for a bit at first but the effort put in makes it easier in the long term.

OK. Onto the guidelines.

Basics:

We teach our students basic manners and ask them to abide by these rules

- Start Small
 - We give small portions at first, especially with meals we know are not all-around crowd pleasers. As we get to know personal eating styles we serve appropriately small or large portions to each child
 - This helps give your child tangible boundaries of how much they need to eat
 - Know they love crackers? Give them one cracker to start and ask them to eat all the broccoli on their plate before getting a second cracker.
 - Use their preferred foods to your advantage with seconds.



- “I would *love* to give you seconds of mac and cheese *as soon as you finish your salad*”

- Chew with your mouth close
 - “I would LOVE to hear what you have to tell me but... please chew and swallow first / ...I don’t want you to choke so wait till your mouth is empty / ... I can’t understand you with food in your mouth.”
- Tummy to the Table/ Sit on your Bottom
 - We use these exact words and remind them that these are “polite manners” or “how we behave at the table”.
- Please and Thank You
 - We serve our students lunch and when offering seconds or optional foods as ask them to say “yes please” or “no thank you”
 - They are really good at this, especially when reminded or the food just remains in the dish and not on their plate until the magic words are said.
 - Napkin in your lap / Eat with your fork, not your hands
 - Unless it’s finger food
 - We do not require our students to eat chips/burritos/carrots with forks
 - May I please be excused?
 - This is a crucial phrase for ensuring that our students are
 - A) getting enough to eat to power them till their next snack/meal
 - B) taking at least one bite of everything
 - This simple step is our method of expanding the palate
 - If the answer is “No”
 - “What about that lonely broccoli? Everything else was tasted and that broccoli is all whole and lonely”
 - “Looks like you need to take 3 more bites of beans” or “You need to eat more beans, how many bites do you think you should take?”
 - “As soon as you eat *this* much (indicated very specifically on their plate)
 - If the answer is “Yes”
 - We have our students clear their plates. While there likely is not a pig bucket and bus tubs in your kitchen your child could easily take their plate to the counter or sink. Or if you scrape your plates into the compost or trash you could have your child do that for you. Just set it up for them ahead of time so they know where to get the spatula and where to scrape their plate and where to put it after.
 - Every one of our students is expected to do this and we absolutely help them if they need a little assistance the first few times. Have a younger sibling? Your Children’s House student can teach their younger sibling the ropes!



What if they are refusing to eat any more? (This can be the trickiest part of meal time. Here are some tools we use)

- “Let’s take a bite together!”
- “Can you take a dinosaur/monster bite?” “Let’s take one together!”
 - I don’t think I’ve ever had a student refuse to take a dinosaur bite with me
- “Sorry bud/dear/my love, you know the expectations (then restate the expectations), you may go play outside/with your toys/watch TV as soon as you eat *this/this much*”
- We do sometimes feed our students - it is a last resort and often gets our most stubborn eaters to have the bare minimum.
- Unfortunately the boundary sometimes is hunger and learning from that hunger - maybe revisiting the challenges at the previous meal that lead to being so hungry now.
- Ms. Katy (*name your preferred teacher*) would LOVE to see your cleared plate/you taking a bite of that lasagna, etc. Why don’t we take a picture of your taking a bite/your clean plate/you scraping your plate.
- Use us to your advantage!! Ask them what they do at school during lunch. “Can you teach me how you eat lunch at school?”



We have the incredible bonus of peer pressure that does not exist in the home most of the time. Children often want to play with their friends more than they don’t want to try one bite of tomato. If these tools aren’t working at home, it’s ok. Your children are resilient and pick up lots of little things. They will likely have good manners and try new foods down the line!

Please send us pictures of your children at meal time!! We would love to see their manners at home and please feel free to use us as leverage for maximum manners :)