

# Feeding Difficulties

## Causes

Sensory differences to textures, smells, temperatures

Rigid behaviors to new foods or places

Challenges with chewing and swallowing

Knowing what hungry and full feels like

Anxiety over uncertainty

## Behaviors

Saying no to certain foods or spitting out food

Meltdowns at mealtime in new environments

Refusing to be near or eat food that looks different

Food falling out of their mouth, gagging

Eating too much or missing meals

## Treating feeding difficulties:

- Food routines- when possible, eat meals at the same time
- **Provide praise**- support and encourage your child during the whole process\*
- **Gradual food exposure**- introduce a new food slowly and in a less stressful way
- Provide food choices
- Food play- encourages fun sensory exploration
- **Food presentation**- add something new to or near the child's plate\*
- **Limit distractions** such as unnecessary people, noises, smells\*

\*See backside for more information

# Helping With Feeding Difficulties:



Scan for citations  
and a related  
Youtube video!

## Provide Praise and Encouragement

Praise builds confidence, encourages trying new foods, and helps your child trust that food you provide is safe.

Make sure to provide praise every step of the way, not just after your child eats the food.

- “I love how you touched that food”
- “You worked hard to keep that on your plate”
- “I’m proud of you for giving it a try”
- “Great exploring”
- “You stayed calm even when it felt tricky”

## Food Presentation

Showing food in a fun or exciting way makes it less scary and encourages the child to consider trying it.

- “Deconstruct” meals- serve food separately from each other
  - Chicken noodle soup can be chicken, noodles, and broth in separate bowls
- Interactive serving- family or buffet style meals where children can choose their own portions
- “Safe Plate”- place less-preferred foods next to the main plate instead of on the same plate
- Divided plate- keeps items close but separate

## Gradual Food Exposure

Step by step way to help children become comfortable with a new food in a less stressful way.

1. Child **looks** at food near or on their plate
2. Child brings food to their nose and **smells** it
3. Child **touches** new food with a finger
4. Child “**kisses**” or brings the food to their mouth
5. Child **licks** new food
6. Child **bites** new food
7. Child **chews** and **swallows** new food

## Limit Distractions

The more that is going on in the environment, the harder it is for the child to focus on eating a new food.

- Remove extra people from the room
- *Only* include preferred foods and one new food
- Allow for longer amounts of time to eat
- Dim lights and remove noises or play quiet, calming music

RECORD FOODS YOU  
HAVE TRIED HERE:

1.  
2.  
3.

4.  
5.  
6.