

Decreasing Mealtime Stress

Avoid This	Why?	Instead Try This
Hiding foods in child's accepted foods	Creates mistrust and causes children to drop foods as a result	Tell a child what is included in their food by sharing
Telling a child it's the "same" as their accepted food, when it's just similar	Small sensory differences are still differences so it can create trust issues around food	Tell them how it's similar and how it's different, present the preferred with the similar side by side
Giving large plates or servings of food your child likely won't eat	Creates a sensory overload which causes stress and can decrease appetite	Let them serve themselves or dime size pieces of non-preferred foods on their plate
Being a short order cook or asking your child what they want to eat	Creates too much control and overwhelm for a child and often causes increase food restrictions over time	Offer at least one preferred food at a meal
Tell them they won't like something or saying to someone they won't eat it	Creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where they automatically stop themselves from even considering trying it	Let them know it's ok to still be learning about new foods
Giving up if a strategy doesn't work right away	It can take HUNDREDS of exposures to one food for an extreme picky eater to willingly try a food	Stick with it and communicate with your child through the challenges
Rewarding or promising desert or a preferred food for eating something	Puts the desert or preferred food on a pedestal, making it more coveted and the food we want them to eat is seen as a means to get what they want	Keep all food even and if desert is offered, then everyone gets it regardless of what is offered
"No Thank you" bites	Tells a child right away that they won't like it and they are taking the bite to satisfy someone else	If they feel brave they can try anything served
Clearing their plate or taking 2 more bites	Causes them to override their internal sense of hunger/fullness and then they become dependent on someone else to regulate food	Ask them to check how their tummy feels and cue them to eat until THEY feel full
Trying to "get" your child to eat	It creates stress and a power struggle for the parents and the child	It's the child's job to eat and parent's job to offer foods