

# PICKY EATERS:

## A SENSORY BASED FEEDING APPROACH

### WHY ARE SOME CHILDREN PICKY EATERS?

Children can be picky eaters for a wide variety of reasons including but not limited to:

- Need for control
- Sensory Sensitivities
- GI issues
- Previous bad experiences- choking, force feeding, allergic reaction etc.

### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF FEEDING CONCERNS?

Some signs to look out for in terms of feeding concerns are:

- Gaging at the sight, taste, texture or smell of foods
- A limited diet
- Coughing or throwing up while eating
- Only eating foods of similar textures and flavors
- Distress at the idea of having to try new foods etc.

### WHAT DO I DO IF I NEED MORE SUPPORT?

Feeding difficulties can be frustrating for you and your child! If you feel you need to reach out for more support about your child's eating or nutritional intake, see some of the suggestions below.

**Reach out to their pediatrician:** Have a candid conversation with your pediatrician about your child's feeding habits. Express your concerns about what is going on and how to go about working to overcome them.

**Early intervention/Elwyn:** Reach out to your local early intervention agency to request an evaluation for feeding concerns. Your child's teacher may be able to help with this!

**Look into feeding therapy:** reach out to a local feeding clinic, speech therapist or occupational therapist to see if they offer feeding therapy for children.



# SENSORY FEEDING GAME

A MEAL USING THE SENSORY HIERARCHY

## WHAT IS THE SENSORY FEEDING APPROACH?

A sensory approach means that you are systematically engaging most of your child's senses during meal time. This helps them process all the sensory input into their body during meal time.

## THE ACTIVITY:

Start with your plate of food in front of you both. Follow the following prompts to work on trying a new food. For each step make sure you demonstrate the skill!

### LOOK:

Encourage your child to look at their plate and describe what the new food looks like! Ask them what color it looks like. Ask them if it looks like another food they like etc.

### POKE:

Encourage your child to poke the food using one finger. Ask them if they think it is cold or hot. Say "Let's see if its warm" and rest your finger on it. Ask if it is squishy etc.

### HOLD:

Encourage your child to hold a small piece in their hand and pick it up.

### SMELL:

Encourage your child to smell the food and describe what it smells like! This is the first time they are bringing the food up to their face so give them a lot of praise!

### KISS:

Encourage and show your child how to give the food a kiss. This is a huge step and lets them taste a small amount of the food without overwhelming them

### SMALL BITE THEN A BIG BITE:

Encourage and show your child how to take a tiny bite to get a taste for the texture then a big bite. Have them describe the taste. You can add in having them spit the food out instead of swallowing if they are very sensitive to the food!



# DO'S AND DONT'S

FOR SENSORY BASED FEEDING

## DO'S

- Encourage messy play with the food
- Serve preferred and preferred foods at the same time
- Eat meal time with your child
- Describe how the foods tastes to you
- Reinforce any interaction with the non-preferred food
- Celebrate the small wins! Even just looking at a new food is a win.
- Play with sensory throughout the week- slime, putty, playdough, shaving cream etc!
- Play with left over food for sensory play!
- Get rid of utensils so your child is encouraged to touch the new foods!

## DONT'S

- Don't force feed your child.
- Don't limit their food exploration
- Don't become frustrated- it is as frustrating for them too.
- Don't make it high pressure- your job is to serve the food.
- Don't give up! It can be frustrating, but its a marathon not a sprint.