

Fostering Healthy Eating Habits in Your Child Care Facility



As a care provider, you play an important role in supporting children to develop good eating habits and feel good about eating. Young children are learning to accept a wide variety of foods and master eating skills and table manners. Learning to accept a new food can take many tries. Pressure from adults to taste or eat a food slows down the process.

Research shows that **children eat better when adults stick to their job of feeding and let children do their job of eating.** Meal and snack times also become more enjoyable.

The “***Division of Responsibility***” model shown below is based on these best practices and was developed by Ellyn Satter, a well-known dietitian and expert in feeding children.

Caregivers are responsible for:

- **What** food is offered (some parents may send food from home)
- **When** food is offered
- **Where** food is offered

Children are responsible for:

- **How much** to eat
- **Whether** to eat (from what is offered)

Create a Positive Eating Environment



- Offer routine meal and snack times, about 2-3 hours apart.
- Sit and eat with the children, role modeling good eating habits, and manners.
- Avoid distractions at eating times (e.g. TV., toys, other children playing).
- Let children serve and feed themselves, with help when needed.

What if a child doesn't want to eat?

Don't worry if a child doesn't want to eat at meal or snack time. Avoid pressure (e.g. bribing, reminding, shaming, praising, "no thank you bite", withholding dessert, etc.). Pressure does not help a child become a better eater.

Instead, invite him to sit with you and the other children at the table to keep you company.



Plan for Snack Time

Healthy snacks provide important nutrients sometimes missed at meals. Serve them at regular times and have children sit and eat together at the table. Grazing on food from an open snack table and sipping on milk or juice between eating times can result in poor eating at mealtimes. It can also lead to tooth decay.



What if a child wants to eat more?

Allow children to decide how much they need to eat at meal and snack times. Children may be hungrier when they are going through a growth spurt.

**Appetites go up and down from day to day.
Children know best how much food they need.**

When Parents Provide a Packed Lunch

Support children as they make choices of what and whether to eat from their lunch boxes (Infants and toddlers will need you to decide what to offer):

Can you pick out the foods you would like to eat for lunch?

You don't want your sandwich today? Let's see what else is in your lunch.

So far you've picked your cookie; what else would you like?



Avoid over-managing a child's lunch box with rules about what order to eat food.

- * If the lunch contains a variety of nutritious foods from Canada's Food Guide, the child will gain adequate nutrition over the course of the day, regardless of what order food is eaten.

Children may be curious about the food in another child's lunch box. Invite children to talk about the different kinds of food they eat at home.

When Child Care Facilities Provide Food

- Plan menus with variety. Don't limit your menu to "kid" foods.
- Include familiar foods along with new foods.
- Let children know how a new food might taste or feel in their mouth:
 - * *"This is tapioca pudding". It is smooth and sweet with little bubbles in it".*
 - * *"A grapefruit is similar to an orange, but not as sweet. It can taste a bit sour, like a lemon."*
- Let children decide for themselves if they like a new food. Use language like:
 - "See what you think"* instead of *"Try it, you'll like it"*
- Keep offering foods, even if they have been rejected before. Try preparing it in another way (e.g. carrot sticks, roasted carrots, grated carrot salad, carrot soup).



Communicate with Parents

Let parents know about your nutrition and feeding policies and communicate with parents about how eating is going.

Speak to parents privately if you have concerns about the nutritional quality of a child's lunch or snack, but do not withhold the food that was packed. Work with parents that need extra support.

Provide nutrition and feeding resources to parents.



Free Online Course for Child Care Providers

“Healthy Eating in the Childcare Setting -
Division of Responsibility Model”

<https://learninghub.phsa.ca/>

Learn more about *how to support children with eating* in child care settings. This course takes approximately one hour to complete and a certificate of completion is available.

For more information:

- Nutrition resources for child care providers and parents www.interiorhealth.ca/childcarefood
- Appetite to Play www.appetitetoplay.com/
- Website devoted to *how to feed children* www.ellynatterinstitute.org/
- Call 8-1-1 to ask a registered dietitian your feeding and nutrition related questions.