



Helping Your Child Thrive at Mealtimes

So many gatherings throughout the year revolve around food or a meal with friends and families. Some children become anxious about new expectations placed on them during these seasonal meals. The smells, colors, sounds, and new tastes can be overstimulating. Here are a few strategies to help your child thrive.

✓ Help Them prepare

Set your child up for success by letting them know the details. Where they are going? Where they will sit? What foods will be offered? Who will be there? This information will allow your child to mentally prepare for the event. Sharing this information with enthusiasm encourages excitement instead of anxiousness.

✓ Talk to family members first

Let family members who are not frequently around your child during meals know that your child is learning about eating at family mealtimes. Communicate with them what you want the meal to look like for your child. Share ideas about maintaining your child's normal eating schedule, offering preferred foods, and reading your child's cues.

✓ Make it fun

Give your child a job to do to help prepare a dish. It could be as simple as getting the ingredients together or starting a timer. Have your child help decorate the table or allow them to use their favorite plates or cups. During the meal, allow them to see you enjoying new foods. This may increase their interest in those foods.

✓ Mealtime interactions

Keep the pressure off. Have your child serve the foods. Allow them to choose if they want to taste something or prefer to just look at or smell the food. It is ok to offer, but not force. When trying a new food, keep the portion size small.

Whether you are going to the beach, the park, or just the back yard, remember this is a different eating environment for your child. Planning ahead for new experiences and focusing on having fun will lead to success with your child's eating.

