



# Mealtime is More Than Feeding

Everyday activities, like mealtime, are fantastic opportunities for children to learn. When caregivers use responsive strategies, children develop healthy eating habits, self-help skills, communication, and strong relationships with the important people in their lives.

Make the most of mealtime with these strategies:

## Seat Your Child Safely

Make sure they're seated upright with no slouching.

## Join Your Child

Sit and eat with them. Model how to use utensils and enjoy your meal together.

## Make Mealtimes Social

Talk with your child about the food, what they're doing, and what you enjoy about the experience.

## Encourage Food Exploration

Let your child touch, smell, finger-feed, and hold utensils to explore their meal.

## Introduce New Foods

Pair new items with foods or sauces your child already likes.

## Offer Choices

Give options for types and amounts of food to support independence and communication.

### Respond to Your Child's Cues

Let them decide how much to eat instead of encouraging them to clean their plate.

### Embrace The Messiness

Let your child dip, squish, and play with their food to get comfortable with new textures and flavors.

### Avoid Distractions

Turn off the TV and other distractions so your child can focus on eating, expressing preferences, and enjoying your attention.

### Serve Age-Appropriate Foods

Offer a variety of safe, easy-to-grasp foods with different tastes, colors, and textures.

### Create A Mealtime Routine

A consistent schedule helps your child know what to expect and feel secure.