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at St Bernadette's presents

Top Tips and Advice for Parents of 'Fussy Eaters'



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Aims of the session

- 1) Develop knowledge of how to respond positively to children who may be considered 'Fussy Eaters'
- 2) Share strategies and resources that promote a positive approach to eating
- 3) Provide opportunities to talk through and discuss concerns.



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Introduction

Fussy or picky eating can be a stressful food-related issue for parents and caregivers to address. A child's appetite can change from time to time and so can their preferences- just like adults, this is normal.

It's important to get a good balance between encouraging children to listen to their own body and explore their preferences, and ensuring that they are being exposed to a variety of foods that promote a healthy relationship with food.

Children need time and space when trying new foods. The goal is to encourage exploration of food without fear, and to avoid power struggles and arguments around meals and food.



What can I do to support my child?

1) Offer new foods

Consistency is key when introducing new foods. But doing too much too soon is a recipe for disaster. This will leave your child feeling overwhelmed. Try to serve one new food at a time, and serve it alongside a food that's a familiar favourite or you know they will enjoy.

E.g. If your child is a fan of macaroni and cheese, try adding broccoli to their plate as well.

Exposure is important. A child may not try a food the first time you offer it, but seeing it on the table or on their plate puts them one step closer to tasting it. A child's acceptance of a food is a multi-step process and does take time. Every child is different, but the steps might be:

- Having a new food near their plate
- Having a small amount of the food on their plate
- Touching the food
- Tasting the food



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What can I do to support my child?

2) Make your child feel involved

Children will be much more willing to try a food if they've been involved in growing it, choosing it, or preparing it. Try to think of ways to involve your child in the selection of new foods.

E.g. Take your child to a farmer's market, where the colorful, fresh fruits and vegetables look interesting. Or even involve them in putting foods in the trolley at the supermarket. This can be made into a game. A treasure hunt, where the child has to find certain items and tick off on their sheet around the supermarket.

You also can involve your child in meals. Depending on their age, allow them to set the table or tear lettuce up for the salad. Most children love whisking eggs for omelets, mixing muffin batter, and pouring their own cereal and milk. You could even allow them to help plan a fun menu and then encourage them to invite their favorite toys to the table. The goal is to get children excited about food and interested in exploring it.



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What can I do to support my child?

3) Make food fun

Playing with food doesn't have to be a bad thing. Let them explore, touch, pull apart and look closely at it.

A child is more likely to eat foods that are colourful, cut into fun shapes, or paired with a dip. It does mean more preparation time but will be worth it just to see your child expand their preferences.

E.g. Use cookie cutters that can create fun shapes out of sandwiches. Or create ants on a log with celery and raisins. Or even try creating a rainbow out of brightly coloured fruits and vegetables.



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What can I do to support my child?

4) Try, try and try again

Your child might not accept the food the first time you serve it for dinner but they might the next time. Try to remain positive. Even the fact that it was on the table and they saw you eat it is helpful.

It might be that they would prefer it steamed, or it might just be that they're not so sure about it yet. The next time you serve it, your child might be more willing to take a bite or two or have some on their plate.

Keep in mind that it can take 15 or more exposures to a food before a child tries a new food. Just having the food on the table or on their plate counts as an exposure!



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What can I do to support my child?

6) Avoid food labelling

Referring to cookies as "yummy" or "treats" and carrots as "healthy" sends the message that vegetables don't taste as good and are something we "have to" eat.

When we stop telling children vegetables are healthy, they tend to show more interest in eating them. Label foods as "good" or "bad" can have a long term impact on their relationship with food. Instead teach children about portions and types of foods our bodies needs.



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What can I do to support my child?

5) Desert and main meal at the same time

Serve desert at the same time as dinner? This sounds strange in so many ways but can do wonders for a child's relationship with food and eating habits. Putting certain foods on a pedestal e.g. "cookies are special and we only get them if we eat our veggies" sends the message that certain foods hold more moral value than others.

Putting dessert foods alongside the rest of dinner allows children to decide what to eat and in what order. They can listen to their bodies.



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What can I do to support my child?

7) Next steps

If your child doesn't outgrow their fussy eating, talk to a doctor, pediatrician or dietician.

Sometimes children who are picky eaters are suffering from a sensory need that truly limits the number of foods they can tolerate. Likewise, having Autism can also impact on the order and way children eat food. Having knowledge and understanding of this will help in the long run.

A range of cutlery and plates can be bought to separate foods if your child struggles with their food touching.



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Other useful websites

<https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/tips-if-your-child-fussy-eater>

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-packed-lunches.html>

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-eating-for-children.html>

<https://www.easybitesapp.com/>

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/602befa1117bd25f81aff681/t/619cf0b9079c800a6509069b/1637675527354/Fussy+eating+guide+and+meal+planner+2021.pdf>



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