

Coaching Kids to Become Good Eaters

Kids are naturally unsure about new foods. This is normal. With time and practice, kids will learn to eat a variety of foods. Adults can help to make learning about food and eating feel safe and comfortable.

Things that help kids learn	Things that make learning harder	Reason
✓ Offering 3 meals and 2-3 snacks at predictable times. Reminding kids when the next meal or snack will be.	✗ Letting kids eat whenever they want.	“Grazing” interferes with kids’ learning about family foods at meal and snack times.
✓ Offering water to satisfy thirst between meal and snack times.	✗ Letting kids drink juice or milk between meals and snacks.	Kids’ tummies can fill up on juice and milk.
✓ Making the same meal for everyone.	✗ Preparing special food for picky eaters.	Seeing others eat a food is a great way to learn about it.
✓ Sitting and eating with kids to show you enjoy healthy food.	✗ Expecting kids to eat foods if they don’t see you eat it.	Kids look up to you. You are their food coach!
✓ Serving new foods over and over, without pressure or praise.	✗ Giving up after only offering a new food a few times.	Kids may need to see a food 15 - 20 times before they decide to eat it.
✓ Offering new foods with familiar foods.	✗ Serving only unfamiliar foods at a meal.	Learning is hard when everything is unfamiliar.
✓ Being honest about what you are serving.	✗ Hiding less favourite foods in sauces or mixed dishes.	Kids need to <i>experience</i> foods in order to like them.
✓ Teaching your kid to politely turn down food they aren’t ready to eat.	✗ Forcing kids to eat something that they are not yet comfortable with.	Kids learn at their own pace.
✓ Respecting tiny tummies. Serving small amounts and allowing seconds.	✗ Nagging or making deals with kids to eat a food or “clean their plate”.	Kid’s hunger and appetite change from day-to-day and meal-to-meal.
✓ Involving kids in cooking and growing food.	✗ Expecting kids to be ready to eat foods that are not familiar.	Growing and cooking helps kids build their comfort with food.
✓ Praising kids on their good manners at the table.	✗ Rewarding kids with dessert or other foods.	Being rewarded with dessert makes some foods seem better than others.
✓ Expecting that in time kids will learn to accept a variety of food.	✗ Telling kids that they are “picky” or “fussy.”	Kids want to live up to your expectations!

Created by Population Health Registered Dietitians

Adults decide *what foods* to offer, and *when* and *where* to serve meals and snacks.

Kids decide *how much* to eat, and *which* foods to choose from what is provided.

