



HELPING CHILDREN BE GOOD EATERS

Provider guidelines

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We want our children to be "good eaters." But what is a good eater? Children who are good eaters take care of their food needs in a positive and matter-of-fact way. They may eat many foods or not so many, try others, and politely turn down still others. They rely on their internal cues for knowing how much to eat. But children who are good eaters have their own ways of behaving with eating. They certainly behave differently from adults!

Children challenge themselves to eat.

Children are both skeptical about new food and push themselves along to master new foods and new eating skills, the same as they work to master other skills. *New* can be a food children haven't seen before, a familiar food prepared in a different way, or *someone they don't know doing the cooking*. Children learn to eat new foods by eating with trusted grownups, by having new foods served so repeatedly they aren't new any more, by seeing their grownups and friends eat them, and by looking at them and tasting them many times.

Children need support to do a good job with eating.

Support applies to both food and the mealtime environment. To feel safe and eat well, children need the trusted and familiar with respect to both people and food. Children need an environment that is pleasant, comfortable, and safe for them, and they need a trusted grownup to sit down with them to eat. With respect to food, children need something on the table that they recognize and generally enjoy. Menus for children need to be considerate of their inexperience and oral-motor immaturity, but not limited to foods they readily accept. Match new foods with familiar foods, less-favorite with favorite. Always include bread (or some bread-like food such as rice or potatoes) Then let the child have seconds and even thirds on the food s/he can

manage, without having to finish, eat, or even taste the less-preferred foods.

Children need to feel in control of their eating.

Children eat *less* well, not better, when they are forced, bribed, or cajoled to eat. Avoid making children take "no thank you bites" as a way of pushing them along to try new food. No thank you bites slow down their learning—and they make them behave rudely. Children eat better when they can pick and choose from foods that are available and decide whether—and how much—to eat. They need the freedom to turn down food they don't want, and the reassurance that they don't have to eat food they have taken. They benefit from knowing they can taste a food and decide not to finish it. When children know they have an "out" with food, they do more and dare more than if they get the feeling they *have* to eat.

Children know how much they need to eat.

At home as well as at their provider's, children eat a lot one day and a little the next, accept a food enthusiastically one day and turn it down the next. They also know *how much* they need to eat. Their internal sense of hunger, appetite, and fullness is stronger than adults', and they eat the right amount to grow properly. They are more likely than adults to stop when they are full rather than when the food is gone. To let children get as many calories as they need, include both high- and low-calorie foods at meals and snacks.

Children waste food. Surveys show that plate waste goes up when there are children in the family. Adults tend to clean their plates and eat the expensive foods (like meat, vegetables, and fruits). Children do not. And they often don't finish their milk. Children can learn to take moderate helpings and ask for more, but even then, waste is inevitable.

Children won't eat food they find

unappealing. Food rejection has as much to do with the *child* as with the *food*. Adults eat food because they like it, but they also eat food that doesn't taste the best to them because the food is good for them or because they paid for it or to keep from getting hungry later.

Children don't. They eat because food tastes good. And they eat what hits them right at the time. While attractive and well-prepared food that is generally familiar is important in allowing children to eat, it doesn't do the whole job. Children have bigger appetites some days than others. They are more active or grow faster some times than others. Some generally favorite foods don't taste good to them some days.

Children need limits. Children do not benefit from being allowed to say "YUK!" at meal time. They benefit from learning to be respectful of other people's feelings—whether those are grownups' feelings about the food they have prepared or their friends' feelings about what they like.

Children benefit from learning to turn down food politely (a simple "no thank you" will do), to be matter-of-fact about choosing not to eat something, and to be subtle about getting something back out of their mouths when they don't feel like swallowing. If children are rude about food, look for ways grownups are putting pressure on their eating. Children may be fighting back.

Feeding demands a division of

responsibility. Grownups provide the *what*, *when*, and *where* of *feeding*, and children do the *how much* and *whether* of eating. Child care providers and parents can provide a variety of attractive, wholesome food in pleasant surroundings—and work together to ensure positive meal- and snack-time. After that, it is up to children to eat. They have their own kinky ways of going about it. Taken on a day-to-day basis, it can *look* like they aren't accepting foods at all well. But over the long term, children *do* eat, and they *do* learn to like a variety of food.

For more about feeding children so they can be good eaters: , read Ellyn Satter's books:

Feeding with Love and Good Sense: The First Two Years This forty page booklet emphasizes *what* to do in words and photographs and demonstrates *why* to do it with feeding stories.

Child of Mine, Feeding with Love and Good Sense A warm, supportive and entertaining book that tells how to parent with food and feeding in a wise, loving and tuned-in way. Satter empowers parents to make their own judgments about nutrition and feeding from infancy through preschool.

Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family: How to Eat, How to Raise Good Eaters, How to Cook Satter emphasizes, "when the joy goes out of eating, nutrition suffers." About raising children to be good eaters, she says: "Expose children to the possibilities, encourage them to explore and allow them to develop their capabilities with eating."

Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming Restricting children's food does more harm than good. Children become whining food sneaks, siblings become spying tattletales, parents become police officers and children get fatter, not thinner. In *Your Child's Weight*, Satter considers babies through adolescents and shares her evidence-based advice for raising your child to get the body that is right for him or her.

www.ellynsatterinstitute.org Loads of free stuff about how to feed, how to eat, parents' success stories, and articles. Shopping for Ellyn Satter's books and videos.