

8 Ways to Get Picky Eaters to Become More Adventurous

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Getting kids to eat new foods sounds simple enough ("just take one bite"). But parents and caretakers know that for many children, new foods — with their new appearances, smells, tastes, textures, temperatures and names — can be scary.

How can you develop positive relationships with food instead of mealtime battles? Try these eight fun tips

🐦 to lay a foundation for stress-free, adventurous eating habits before the first bite.

Leverage Story Time

Teach your kids about foods and recipes from around the world, including what children in different cultures eat. Read about food-based professions such as bakers, farmers and chefs. Watch cooking shows and videos with your kids. Talk with them about cooking and food prep.

Tease Them with Scrumptious Smells

Think about those smells that get you out of bed in the morning – brewing coffee or the aroma of breakfast cooking. Smell is a significant and sometimes forgotten part of our eating experience. Playing games to positively engage with food smells outside of mealtimes can demystify novel foods. Use spice jars to guess scents. Or add orange, vanilla or other extracts to bubbles before blowing them outside. These non-eating activities can build happy associations with new smells before you use them in recipes.

Unleash the Artist

Use food for fun art projects. For example, fruit stamps: halved strawberries make heart-shaped stamps, and halved apples are star-shaped. String garlands or jewelry from uncooked pasta, popcorn or cranberries. (Caution: popcorn and chunks of food can be choking hazards in young children.)

Flip the Script

Do you find yourself telling friends and family, "My child is a picky eater"? Train yourself to use hopeful language instead: "My child is learning to love new things." Instead of "He doesn't like it," say, "He hasn't had it enough times." Using positive statements helps validate your child's feelings in your mind while recognizing that their opinions towards specific foods can change.

Sort by Color

Chop brightly colored fruits and vegetables such as red cherry tomatoes, green kiwis and purple grapes into small pieces. With your child, sort them by color while saying the name of the color aloud. Focusing on the game rather than on their discomfort with new foods, can cultivate your child's acceptance of new textures. FYI: As with popcorn and apples, whole cherry tomatoes and grapes are choking hazards in young children.

Name It

Which do you think your child would rather eat: steamed carrots or X-Ray Vision Coins? In the same way that descriptions on restaurant menus can influence what you order, creative names in the kitchen or cafeteria can pique a child's interest.

Shine the Spotlight

Many kids love being the star. So, put them in the spotlight and explore new foods. Take videos of your child speaking to their ideal audience — a younger sibling, a stuffed animal, a favorite superhero — about taking that first bite into a new food!

Get Everyone Out into the Garden

Studies demonstrate that a garden improves children's knowledge of produce and increases their intake of fruits and vegetables. Make it a family activity throughout the year. Look at seed catalogs in the winter, starting the seeds in the spring, weed and harvest all summer long, and turn over the soil in the fall. Gardens can be joyful and patient teachers.

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