

Early Years Inclusion Team

Food is Fun - Play Ideas and Target Foods

Fussy eating is very common. There are a number of reasons:

- Sensory hypersensitivity – children may over react to and be put off by textures, smells and the sight of food.
- Rigid behaviour patterns – children become restricted in the range of foods they will eat and will often only eat brand specific food.
- Children may have difficulty generalising and get stuck on the look, taste or texture of the food. They will often not eat foods that are touching each other or combined and will show disgust at the smell or sight of non-accepted foods.

Foods

Pasta Custard

Cereal Jelly

Rice Popcorn

Beans Tomato Sauce

Spaghetti hoops Vegetables

Yogurt Fruit

Jam Water

Start with dry foods e.g. pasta and progress to wet foods (cooked pasta). Then encourage mixing foods/textures together.

Vary temperature of food if possible.

Encourage child to assist with tidying up/washing up if possible.

Make play purposeful e.g. find marbles in non-foods/foods to post in marble run, find bricks to build tower.

Keep activities non-threatening.

Activity Ideas

Dolly/Tea set - mash up foods or combine foods e.g. stir yogurt into cereal and feed to dolly.

Farm/Animals - make tracks in tomato sauce etc with animals and tractors. Hide animals under large pasta shells and gradually make it messier.

Pictures - use different types of food/non-foods to make pictures of flowers, faces, shapes etc. Use paper plates?

Cars/Tracks - spread something messy on tray or table and build roads with spaghetti, penne pasta etc. use broccoli or cauliflower for trees.

Drive cars along road to make tracks.

Marble Run/Ball Cascade - find marbles, balls in foods or non-foods.

Threading - thread penne pasta onto laces or straws.

Colour Matching - mix different types of fruits and vegetables together e.g.

1. raisins and grapes - sort by colour
2. broccoli and carrots - sort by colour
3. progress to wetter/mushier types e.g. bananas, sliced tomatoes

Once the child is happy to touch and explore the food, progress to smelling, licking, biting and tasting one small piece.

Messy food is fun sessions should be done away from where the child normally eats and not carried out at mealtimes.

When you think your child is ready to have a food introduced at mealtimes, place the targeted food on a separate plate a little distance away from your child. There should be no expectation to eat it the first time it is introduced. Gradually move it closer and when you think your child is ready, place it on their plate. Encourage your child to tolerate the food on their plate then lick or taste it when they are ready. This may have to be done gradually over a few mealtimes.

Example:

Target foods: pasta and sauce

Start with dry pasta (variety of shapes and colours)

Choose activities – threading, pictures, patterns etc.

Progress to cooked pasta

Continue with play activities.

Encourage smelling it

When happy to smell it progress to licking it

When happy to lick it progress to biting it (doesn't have to swallow)

When happy to bite it progress to eating one small piece

Then tolerate on plate at snack/mealtimes

Progress to pasta with sauce eg tomato ketchup and continue with play activities to allow your child to become familiar with the smell and texture of it.

Encourage smelling it

When happy to smell it progress to licking it

When happy to lick it progress to biting it (doesn't have to swallow)

When happy to bite it progress to eating one small piece

Then tolerate on a plate at snack/mealtimes

Each stage may take a couple of weeks or more of daily practice.

Provide the experience of food in a non-threatening way. Make a scrap book of the foods your child has tried and liked.

