

Speech and Language Therapy Service for Children, Barking and Dagenham

Child and Family Centre

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Dear Parent / Carer / Nursery / School,

We are sending you this **Food explorers pack** because your child or a child you work with has been identified as having:

- “behavioural feeding difficulties” or “sensory based food aversion”.

This means that they have some foods that they will accept and can manage to eat but introducing new foods can be really difficult and foods might be rejected because of the way they look, feel, smell or taste. Your child probably isn't very interested in food and will try to refuel as quickly as possible so they can get back to something they enjoy more. From the information we have, we are not concerned that your child has a problem swallowing their accepted foods safely or managing fluids safely.

When your child doesn't eat well it is one of the most difficult and stressful experiences as a parent as our most basic instinct is to feed our children. We hope that this pack will help you understand more about your child's difficulties with eating and give you some ideas to help make positive changes.

We encourage you to start by watching a video online. This is part of the SOS approach to feeding resources and is available free to watch via link below. Alternatively you can search SOS approach to feeding – parent caregiver resources and you will find the video.

<https://sosapproachtfeeding.com/parent-workshop-when-children-wont-eat/>

After you have watched the video, have a read through our information pack and start to use some of the ideas with your child. Persevere and be consistent because making changes takes time and **most importantly try to have some FUN with food with your child.**

If you would like to access further support with feeding, you can attend our online drop-in sessions - please email BDSpCommChildren@nelft.nhs.uk for more details

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Sitting down for eating

Why should my child sit to eat?

Eating, drinking and swallowing are complex processes which need full concentration to keep us safe. How and where your child is sitting to eat can have a huge impact on the success of a meal. Sitting without proper support is so tiring and painful for your child that they are likely to rush a mealtime or avoid it altogether. Try sitting on a chair and raise your feet from the floor, notice how hard you have to work your tummy muscles just to keep upright. If your child is concentrating on trying to keep themselves upright without proper support they will not be able to concentrate on the task of eating safely.

What is the correct position for eating?

- The ideal sitting position for eating requires the hips, knees and feet to be at 90 degrees with the weight evenly distributed.
- Chair seat and your child's back should be at 90 degrees to support and maintain an upright position.
- Use a highchair with a foot rest or position a foot rest under the table (this can be made from a box / book) to support the 90 degree positioning of hips, knees and ankles.
- Feet should be sitting comfortably apart, resting on the floor or footrest.
- Use towels, cushions and wedges to help support good posture and eating position.
- Straps and seat belts can help to keep the pelvis stabilised and encourage symmetry and stability.
- Provide a solid table surface, ideally positioned between the child's belly button and chest level.



Develop a mealtime routine

Selective Eating Mealtime Routines



<u>Do</u>	<u>Avoid</u>
<p>Eat together</p> <p>Sit and share a meal with your child so you can show them what to do. Your child trusts you more than anyone so if they see you eating a food they can see it is safe. You are also showing them what to do and how to develop their skills.</p> <p>Encourage mealtime as a family as much as possible.</p>	<p>Distractions</p> <p>Your child can only concentrate on one thing at a time. If there is a TV on or other screens or toys your child will concentrate on those.</p> <p>Eating, drinking and swallowing are very complicated and need full concentration.</p>
<p>Have a structured routine with 3 mealtimes (30 minutes maximum) and 2 snacks.</p>	<p>Forcing them to eat.</p> <p>Being forced to eat something you don't want is a horrible experience and will put the child off eating even more. The aim is to create positive experiences of food.</p>
<p>Sit down for eating</p>	<p>Following the child around with the food.</p>
<p>Fill most of the plate with foods that your child likes</p> <p>Fill the plate with only the amount of food your child will eat (not the amount you would like them to eat)</p>	<p>Setting a goal that is too big (e.g. eating three slices of bread)</p> <p>Setting a goal and changing it (e.g. "just one more" and then offering "just one more again")</p>
<p>Give your child the time and space to eat at an appropriate pace (e.g. 20 mins)</p> <p>Let your child be messy with food</p>	<p>Make your child sit at the table until they have finished their plate (e.g. over 20 mins).</p> <p>Saying phrases like "stop playing with your food".</p>
<p>Be consistent between adults</p>	<p>Pleading deals (e.g. if you eat this fruit, I'll let you play on the iPad)</p> <p>Making threats (e.g. if you don't finish this, I will take away your toy car)</p>

It is vital to turn off all distractions: No toys, iPads, TV or mobile phone videos at mealtimes



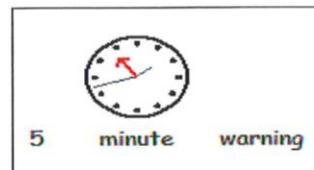
Develop a mealtime routine

Routines help us understand what is going to happen and make a task more easy to manage. Setting up a daily mealtime routine will help your child to learn what to expect at mealtimes and will help them to be less anxious about it. Try using this mealtime routine and show your child the pictures to help them understand.

Scheduled mealtimes

Follow the schedule every day for each mealtime. This helps children to start to understand the routine of mealtimes and helps them to realise what is expected of them.

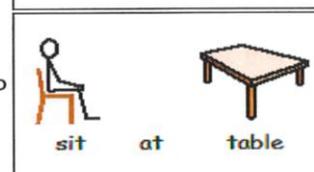
Step 1: Give the child a verbal warning:
"We will eat in 5 minutes"



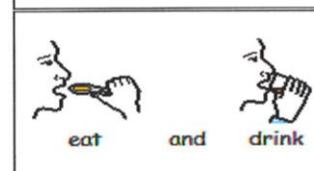
Step 2: Say: "Wash hands" Bring the child to the sink to wash their hands



Step 3: Say: "Time to eat." Give the child their plate to carry to the table. Bring the child to the table and sit them on a chair.



Step 4: Say: "Eat your food" and "Drink your drink" Don't force them to eat/drink. Try to do this in a playful manner. After 30 minutes, the mealtime has finished.



Step 5: Say: "Clean up." Child to put food in bin or hand plate to parent. Wash hands.



Make sure mealtimes do not last longer than 20-30 minutes. Snacks should be 10-15 minutes and not longer.

There should be at least two hours between mealtimes and snack times. This gives the tummy enough time to digest the last meal and develop an appetite for the next meal.

Building a mealtime routine



Meals are made to be social and enjoyable experiences. For both adults and children it is a time of reflection, comfort and connection with family and friends. During mealtimes, children should be encouraged to explore new foods but have the option to decline and eat the foods that they are familiar with.

1. Eat together as a family

Eating meals together at the dining table or on a picnic rug helps your child to understand that they are in a defined area for eating and drinking. You may have to start small and expect your child to sit for 30 seconds and slowly increasing this over time. Allow your child to wander away, but ensure that the finger food or meal stays at the table or rug. Eating together as a family as much as possible shows your child some good eating models. If your child eats alone for all meals, they won't learn about what a positive experience eating can be.

2. Sitting to eat

Children need to sit safely, in an upright position so they can swallow food properly and aid digestion. Your child should be seated in one place when eating whether this is in a high chair, at the dining table, child's table and chair or on the floor; setting clear routines and boundaries for meal times.

Do not chase your child around the room with food. They will not see the importance of eating and see it as play where they can come and go as they please. They need to be seated to learn how to chew and to appreciate a variety of textured foods.

3. Offer a choice at mealtimes

This will help give your child some control to their mealtimes. It may also be things like:

- Choosing their own cutlery, plate, bowl or cup
- Where to place certain foods on the plate (e.g. on top of the rice vs. mixed together vs. put to the side of the plate)
- How much they want on their plate
- How something is cut (e.g. sandwich cut in triangles vs. squares)
- Choice between two side dishes (e.g. carrots vs. peas)

4. Try introducing an exploring plate or scrap bowl

This is a plate or bowl on the table where a food item can be put by the child if they cannot tolerate having it on their plate. This is a very important step in building and maintaining the trust / promise that you have said "you do not have to eat this". This needs to be respected since we have encouraged mealtimes to be stress-free.

By introducing a scrap bowl, your child has a choice 'to eat it' and 'not to eat'. It encourages them to interact with the new food since they will physically need to put it in the scrap bowl.

Food exploration / Messy Play



This is the time to have lots of fun with your child and help them to learn about food. In order for your child to try a new food they need many opportunities to explore the food with all their senses (e.g. eyes, smell, touch). We can do this through every day routines and in play. During these sessions, do the following at snack times rather than mealtimes to ensure your child does not decrease their calorie intake. Encourage your child to engage and explore in messy play with their hands, arms and face. Use a plastic container and gradually introduce foods to it. Dry foods like cereal are good foods to start with as dry foods are not too difficult to wipe from your hands. Use cereals such as Weetabix to crush, sprinkle, drive cars in, roll balls in, and let plastic people or animals jump in or use spoons to feed dolly or teddy.

Encourage your child to use as many senses around food exploration as possible. Talk about what food looks like, how it smells or sounds, and what it may feel like. This helps them to safely explore foods without the pressure to have to eat the food. Don't ask your child to eat the food, just to explore in a fun and relaxed manner.

- Use snack times 1-2 times a day as an opportunity to introduce new foods. Start off with transitional finger foods; such as breakfast cereals, baby puffs or dry Cheerios before moving onto soft bite and chew foods; such as wholemeal bread fingers, softly cooked carrot sticks and ripe pear. Offer these on your child's tray or plate and allow them to explore the foods.
- Let your child get messy with the food. This is a normal part of development. Praise them when they touch, smell, lick or taste the food. Let them explore the foods by themselves. Do not try and take this to their mouth to feed them as they may be put off by this and reject any other food you offer to explore.
- Once they accept some of the alternative foods you may introduce at snack times and exploring times, they can slowly be introduced alongside their accepted foods at meal times. These may need to remain on a separate plate initially.

Messy play activity ideas

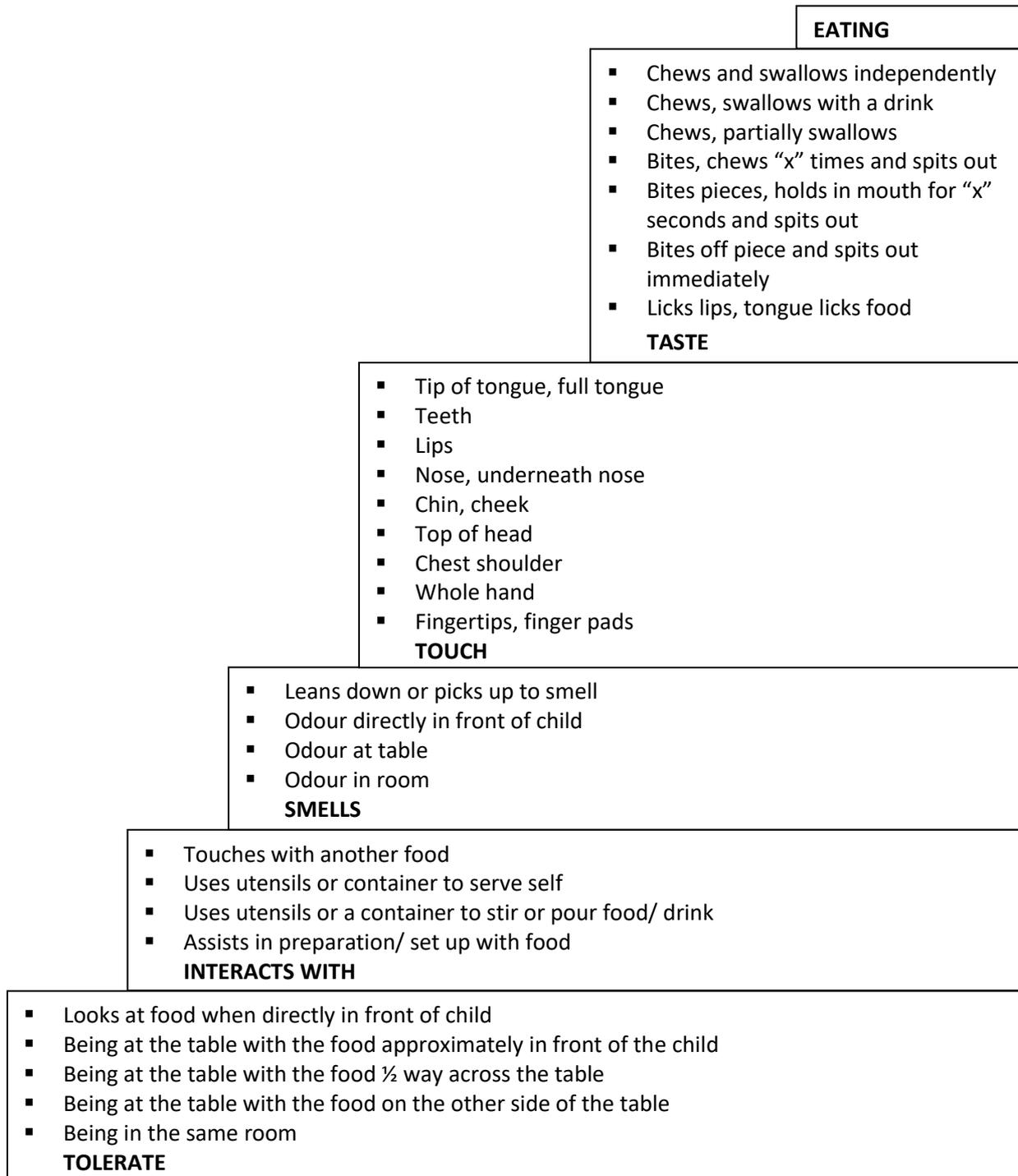
If the aim is to encourage the child to expand their food intake use food items for messy play. Stage 1 activities are easiest for most children.

Activities to Encourage Tolerance of Messy Hands

Stage 1 - hard and dry textures	Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dry sand ○ Plastic or wooden toys ○ Sticking activities using glue-stick and dried food (pasta, beans, rice) ○ Toy food and tea-sets ○ Exploring uncut hard food (apple, carrot, potato) ○ Objects hidden in rice, pasta, dry sand ○ Hard and dry objects in a feely bag, or use for a treasure hunt 	Food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hard fruit (apple, pear) ○ Hard vegetables (carrot, celery) ○ Dried fruit and vegetables ○ Rice cakes ○ Cereals (no milk) ○ Crackers ○ Hard cheese
Stage 2 – soft textures	Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sponge printing ○ Vegetable printing ○ Painting using brushes ○ Finger painting ○ Cooked spaghetti in paint ○ Wet sand play ○ Soft toys ○ Squeezy toys ○ play dough ○ Simple cooking activities using utensils ○ Objects hidden in cooked rice, pasta or wet sand ○ Cooking activities, using tools (spoons, whisks) ○ Drive cars or roll balls through paint 	Food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Smooth yogurt ○ Soft fruit (banana, orange, pineapple, melon, grapes) ○ Soft cooked vegetables (peas, sweetcorn, broccoli, mashed potato) ○ Baked beans ○ Cooked pasta and rice (no sauce) ○ Soft and crumbly cheese ○ Smooth soups
Stage 3 – soft wet messy textures	Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cornflour ○ Liquid glue for sticking ○ Collage ○ Paint mixed with glitter ○ Crazy soap/foam ○ Objects hidden in jelly ○ Cooking activities using hands (fairy cakes, flapjacks, biscuits) ○ Make faces on paper plates using dried fruit with mashed banana for “glue”, and fingers used instead of glue spreaders ○ Add colouring to yoghurt and muesli mix, and model with it 	Food <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yogurt with pieces of fruit ○ Cereals with milk (porridge, cornflakes, Weetabix) ○ Cooked pasta and rice (with sauce) ○ Textured soups and casseroles ○ Ice-cream

Steps to eating

These are all the steps children have to work through before they will be confident to chew and swallow food. Start from the bottom of the table and work out where your child is for a particular food then aim to show them how to move to the next step during messy play activities. Children will be more confident with some foods than others so find out where they are for each food. If your child gets up and leaves the room when a certain food is presented they are showing they cannot tolerate being close to that food yet, start by getting them used to the food being in the room. If they are able to touch food using fingertips aim to move on to getting them comfortable with whole hands in food – back and palm.



Try using a **graded exposure ladder** with your child if they like to see and be praised for how well they are doing with exploring food.

The food I am trying is: _____

Stage of Testing	Have I tried it?				
 Swallow in my tummy	<input type="checkbox"/>				
 Chew	<input type="checkbox"/>				
 Nibble	<input type="checkbox"/>				
 Lick	<input type="checkbox"/>				
 Put on Lips	<input type="checkbox"/>				
 Smell	<input type="checkbox"/>				
 Touch	<input type="checkbox"/>				
 Look START HERE	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Show your child how to climb up the ladder by exploring a food. Write the name of the food they are exploring at the bottom.

Start by looking at the food and talk about how it looks. What shape is it? What colour? When they can do this give them a sticker / tick / colour in the 'look' box.

If they can do that, move onto the next step 'touching' the food. Talk about how it feels. Is it warm / cold / smooth / rough / bumpy / hard / soft? If you break it how does it sound? If they can do this praise and reward them and keep going to the next step. If touching the food is too hard try with gloves or by using a toy / spoon / fork or putting the food in a plastic bag so there is a barrier between it and your child's skin. Remember – go slowly, have fun, praise them for every tiny step.

Food exploration ideas to try



Activity 1: Regularly involve your child in preparing and cooking a meal. This helps your child build interest and interact with food without pressure. These can be simple tasks like:

- Stirring a stew with a spoon
- Measuring or mixing a cake
- Adding a sauce or paste to a dish
- Drizzling oil or dressing on a salad
- Bringing a dish from the kitchen to the table
- Spreading butter on bread for a sandwich

Activity 2: Cups and spoons at bath time or playtime: Model and jointly play with mealtime utensils (e.g. pots and pans, spoons, cups, and plates). This can help your child feel comfortable touching, holding and mouthing these items. Put these in the bath for your child to play with or have these on the floor to explore.

Activity 3: Go shopping together: Visit a local supermarket to buy food that will be cooked and prepared later. Let the child have control of some of the money to pay for the food. This again exposes the child to food and drink without having to eat it. If your child is exploring foods, let them choose which food to explore, e.g. “Do you want to cut up the red apple or green apple?”

Activity 4: Tea party: Hold a pretend tea party with a doll or teddy use real foods (e.g. biscuits, making tea). This gives your child a time to practise exploring food without the threat of having to eat it and take an active role in pretend mealtime.

Further Advice:

Bottle drinking

If your child is stuck on a bottle introduce the beaker to all snack and meal times first. The bottle should be out of sight at these times to familiarise your child to the new cup. Using an open cup or a free-flow cup without a valve will help your child learn to sip and is better for your child’s teeth. It might be messy at first but be patient and stick with the same cup to avoid confusion. Your child will gradually learn how to drink from an open cup.

Milk

If your child is given too much milk throughout the day, this can fill them up and make them not hungry enough to want to try foods. Your child should gradually move towards eating 3 meals a day in addition to milk between 7 and 9 months. As they eat more solids they will want less milk. From 12 months this should be approximately 350mls of milk or two servings of dairy products alongside three meals, two snacks and water throughout the day. Remember: Milk is a food not a drink.

Vitamin Supplements:

The World Health Organisation recommends all children aged 6 months to 5 years should be given vitamin supplements containing vitamins A, C and D every day. If your child refuses to chew a vitamin supplement, you can also get liquid supplements which can be added to juice.

Virtual Feeding Drop In Session

For parents/carers with questions about eating and drinking



At our drop in sessions, our feeding team will be able to offer you virtual support about your feeding concerns, such as:

- Picky eating
- Introducing new foods
- Bottle weaning
- Independent eating

On: Thursdays at 1-2PM

(These sessions will run every two months.)

Hosted by: Barking and Dagenham - Speech and Language Therapy (Feeding Team)

For more information and to receive the link to join the drop in session, please email bdspcommchildren@nelft.nhs.uk.

(Please put 'feeding drop in' in the subject line.)