



Tips for common mealtime struggles

Tips:

- **Set expectations:** Give clear and simple instructions.
- **Give choices:** Which side of the table would you like to sit on? Letting them take turns setting the table, serve themselves, and letting them choose what kind of conversations they would like to have.
- **Explanations:** Help them understand different kinds of textures, and flavors.
- **Needs:** During the day, try to connect with them. Behavior is a language on its own, look into what your child is trying to communicate to you.
- **Routine:** Make mealtime a regular part of the routine.
- **Environment:** Keep the mealtime environment calm with less distractions. Play calm music, dim the lights, take break from the electronics.

Reasons for mealtime struggles:

- **Sensory processing:** Trying new food, textures, flavours, smells, and colours is a learning experience for children. They may not like it and refuse it, or start crying.
- **Needs are not met:** During the day, if child did not get attention from their caregiver, challenging behaviours during the mealtime might occur.

Did you know?

New food takes at least 8 tries for children to like it.

Healthy eating is eating for hunger. Let the child decide how much they eat. Try not to reward children for eating food.

More tips:

- **Logical consequences:** If the behavior occurs, explain the consequences and be consistent with them.
- **Time limit:** Children will usually eat when they are hungry, within 20 to 30 minutes. They will let you know when they have had enough. Respect these cues. Meals may be as short as a few minutes and should last no longer than 30 minutes.