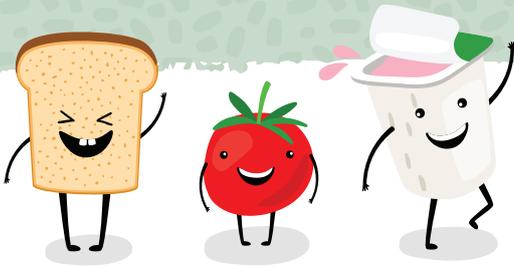


# Let's support our kids to eat well

school  
Mealtimes

dr. kyla  
PAEDIATRIC  
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## Introduction

*This generation of children are growing up in a time of extreme diet culture, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. Healthy eating advice is conflicting and confusing. Teachers are under-resourced. Parents are overwhelmed. Health Professionals are seeing the impacts in their clinics. Everyone is struggling to know what is best.*

*But it doesn't have to be like this.*

**As a community there are lots of ways we can support this generation to become confident, adventurous eaters.**

Our aim is for children to grow into teens and adults who:

- ✓ Enjoy a wide variety of foods
- ✓ Listen to their hunger and fullness cues
- ✓ Feel in control around all types of food
- ✓ Feel comfortable in their bodies



## What could it look like?

Read on for how to do this below

### Parents and caregivers who:

- ✓ Send a range of foods to school.
- ✓ Role model confident, adventurous eating at home.
- ✓ Demonstrate body respect.
- ✓ Advocate for their child's needs.
- ✓ Trust their child to eat freely.
- ✓ Trust teachers to support their child.

### Teachers and schools who:

- ✓ Create a safe eating environment at school.
- ✓ Model positive attitudes towards food, health and bodies.
- ✓ Protect children from food and body shaming, nutrition misinformation and diet-talk.
- ✓ Support children to eat freely from their lunchboxes during dedicated mealtimes.

### Which leads to children who:

- ✓ Choose happily from their lunchbox.
- ✓ Eat as much as they need to be full.
- ✓ Are free from feelings of guilt, shame or fear around food.
- ✓ Feel confident to try new foods, in their own time.

Some of this will be challenging for us. We might need to unlearn some old rules about food and our bodies. We will need to trust our children to make decisions that we are used to making for them. It won't be perfect. But it will be worthwhile.

**Change is coming.**

**Let's work together to bring it in.**

# How to support your child to become confident, adventurous eaters



## What is happening?

*School Mealtimes and Family Mealtimes aim to support school-aged children to become confident, adventurous eaters. Within the Family Mealtimes membership, parents are supported to create positive mealtime experiences for the whole family at home. At the same time, School Mealtimes aims to change school policy and support teachers to create safe and empowering school food environments.*

### Overall aims

**This advice builds on the wonderful work done by the Ellyn Satter Institute.**

- ✓ For our children to enjoy a variety of foods.
- ✓ For our children to grow as their body is meant to.
- ✓ For our children to choose happily from what we provide in their lunchbox and at all meals.
- ✓ For our children to trust their own hunger and eat as much as they need to be full.
- ✓ For our children to feel confident to try new foods, in their own time, and without us having to enforce it.
- ✓ For our children to be free from feelings of guilt, shame or fear around food.
- ✓ For our children to be in control around all foods, and in charge of their body.
- ✓ For parents to feel confident and stress free about what their child eats.
- ✓ For all of us to enjoy family mealtimes.

### What you can do to help?

**We follow the Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding approach (summarised on page 4). Sticking to your jobs in this approach, parents can:**

- ✓ Offer your child a variety of foods, including ones they like and ones they are still learning to like.
- ✓ Include both nutrient-dense 'core' foods and other foods (sometimes called 'junk' foods) often enough that your child learns to view them all neutrally, and not 'good' or 'bad'. This helps them to feel in control around all kinds of foods.

- ✓ Stay in charge of the menu and what you offer - you don't have to cater to your child's demands.
- ✓ Offer food every 2-3 hours but not in between. This helps your child to be hungry at mealtimes, and learn to listen to their hunger and fullness cues.
- ✓ Include at least one 'safe' food that you know your child is happy to eat at every meal and snack (but you don't need to provide all of their favourite foods at every meal). For kids going through a picky stage, these might be foods like bread, plain pasta or rice, fruit, yoghurt or cheese.
- ✓ Let your child choose from what's on offer. Make sure there's enough of the 'safe' food available to them, REGARDLESS of if they eat any of the other foods you've offered.
- ✓ Resist the temptation to negotiate or coax them to eat (this includes "one more bite of this before you get that").
- ✓ Trust your child to eat as much as they need to be full at each meal and snack. Only they know how much that is. Sometimes they'll eat a very small amount (normal- don't comment) and sometimes they'll eat a lot (also normal - don't comment!).
- ✓ Sit down and eat at the same time as your child without talking about food. You could talk about the weather, your plans for tomorrow or other random topics. This time for talking is really valuable during the school years and beyond.
- ✓ Eat a variety of foods in front of your child. You're the best teacher they've got!

## Try not to do these things

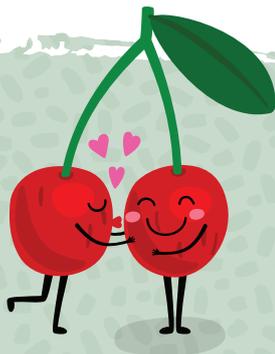
- ✓ You don't need to give your child food whenever they ask for it, wait for meal or snack times.
- ✓ Try not to make a big deal about food. This includes adding emotions to food ("I'm so proud of you for trying that"), adding pressure to mealtimes ("You need to try it before you can get down from the table") or emphasising sweet or treat foods ("you've got a biscuit you lucky girl!").
- ✓ Try not to question your child about food ("Do you like it? Is it delicious? Yummmm").
- ✓ Try not to offer a back-up option if your child doesn't want to eat what you've served (as long as you've included at least one 'safe' option and let them have as much of it as they need to be full).
- ✓ Try not to praise or focus on their eating (even if you're happy with what they've eaten).
- ✓ Try not to restrict or pressure your child's food choices. Once you have decided something is going to be offered, it is up to them to choose if and how much of it they eat at that mealtime.
- ✓ You don't need to discipline your child for not eating. Try not to take food refusal personally, this is your child doing their job.
- ✓ Try not to beat yourself up if you slip up. That's life! Try again at the next mealtime, without making a big deal of it in front of your child.

## Signs things need to change

- ✓ Frequent crying at the table or mealtime 'battles'.
- ✓ Bargaining about how much to eat.
- ✓ Having to make different meals for different members of the family.
- ✓ Crying or whining for food between meals and snacks.
- ✓ Seeming 'out of control' around some foods.
- ✓ Signs that your child feels afraid, ashamed or guilty about their eating, such as secret eating, hiding food, restrictive eating, bingeing or making up for.
- ✓ General stress around food.

Parents, grandparents, teachers and other carers have such an important role in setting kids up for a lifetime of positive eating habits. Whilst young children are notoriously fussy in their early years, having a consistent and stress-free approach to mealtimes makes a significant difference to how confident kids feel about new foods as they get older. A bit of change now pays off significantly in the end.

Tip from  
Dr Kyla



*This approach gets easier the longer you practice it. It can also take a while to see a difference in your child's eating. Keep the long game in mind and get in touch if you need some support x*

For  
website  
details, see  
page 4

# Summary of the Division of Responsibility in Feeding (DoR)



Join us!

family  
Mealtimes

If you want to learn more about this approach, join us over at Family Mealtimes, a membership program for families with school-aged children. Packed with meal and lunchbox inspiration, recipes, advice and support, Family Mealtimes aims to take the stress out of feeding your whole family.

➤ [www.mealtimes.com.au](http://www.mealtimes.com.au)

If you have younger children, check out Baby Mealtimes and Toddler Mealtimes for age-appropriate support.

➤ [www.babymealtimes.com.au](http://www.babymealtimes.com.au)

➤ [www.toddlermealtimes.com.au](http://www.toddlermealtimes.com.au)



## Parent Jobs

**WHAT:** You decide what you are offering at each snack or meal. Your child is not in charge of choosing the menu. Aim to be considerate of their preferences, without catering to their every wish. This means making sure there's at least one component that they can comfortably eat.

*"There are popcorn and strawberries for morning tea today."*

If your child doesn't want those options then that's fine. They choose not to eat at that mealtime. You might say *"You're in charge of your eating. If you're not hungry then you don't need to eat."*

If they want to eat lots of these two foods then that's ok as well. You might say *"You can have as much as you need for your tummy to be full"*. It's important that you don't comment on the amount though, or try to talk them into eating more or less of any components.

**WHEN:** You decide when to offer food. As a general rule, allow around 20 mins for eating and 2-3 hours between each meal and snack.

*"It's morning tea time now. Come and sit at the table for morning tea."*

If your child asks for food/tries to help themselves between meals you can let them know when the next meal is. You might say *"It's not time for eating just yet. We'll have lunch after we've hung out the washing and been to the park"*. If your child tries to help themselves to food you need to be firm, but stay neutral. *"It's not time for eating just yet. I'll let you know when it's lunch time"* (and follow through with that).

**WHERE:** You decide where you are eating. It can be at the table, on the couch, on a picnic rug, wherever. You can tell your child calmly that they need to sit with you for that meal or snack.

*"You need to sit with me while I eat my snack. You can get down/watch the iPad/go play after that."*

**NO PRESSURE:** Your job is to make sure that eating or mealtimes DO NOT involve emotions.

This means managing your frustration levels, keeping calm and just focusing on your jobs described above. If your child chooses to only eat one part of the meal, or eat a large portion of something that's ok. Do your best not to comment on the eating at all.

Make sure you don't add emotion to this e.g. it's not helpful to remind your child that they ate a big morning tea etc. It's also not helpful to talk about food while eating. This is important for all caregivers. We don't want children to sense any judgement or pressure about their eating. Keep the conversation light and away from food.

## Child Jobs

**To decide if they will eat anything at the meal/snack you have chosen and decide how much.**

This is where you have to trust your child. It takes a little while for them to learn about what their tummy is telling them and respond - but they will!