

A Joyful First Bite

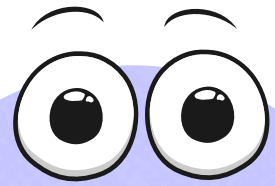
Supporting Young Children in Exploring New Foods
with Joy and Confidence



1. Exploring Food Step by Step

Many children need time and trust to try new foods. Small steps matter!

Introduce food in stages:



Look at it
(on the table,
in someone's hand)



Touch it
(on a plate, with
fingers, on lips)



Smell it
(bring close to nose,
describe the smell)



Kiss/Lick it
(gentle first
taste)



Bite / Spit if needed
(it's okay not to swallow!)



Chew and Swallow
when ready



Tip: Repeated exposure in low-pressure settings helps children feel safe and curious.

1. Exploring Food Step by Step - The “32 Steps to Eating”



STEPS TO EATING

- looks at food when directly in child's space
- being at the table with the food just outside of child's space
- being at the table with the food ½ way across the table
- being at the table with the food on the other side of the table
- being in the same room

TOLERATES

- uses utensils or container to serve self onto own plate/space
- uses utensils or a container to stir or pour food/drink outside of own space
- uses utensils or a container to stir or pour food/drink for others
- assists in preparation/set up with food

INTERACTS WITH

- leans down or picks up to smell
- odor in child's forward space
- odor at table
- odor in room

SMELLS

- tip of tongue, top of tongue
- teeth
- lips
- nose, underneath nose
- chin, cheek
- top of head
- chest, neck
- arm, shoulder
- whole hand
- fingertips, fingerpads
- one finger tip

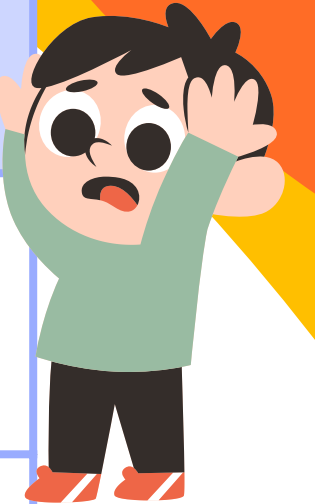
TOUCH

EATING

- chews and swallows whole bolus independently
- chews, swallows whole bolus with drink
- chews, swallows some and spits some
- bites, chews “x” times & spits out
- bites pieces, holds in mouth for “x” seconds & spits out
- bites off piece & spits out immediately
- full tongue lick
- licks lips or teeth

2. Common Mealtime Challenges and Gentle Strategies

Challenge	What You Can Do
Child throws food	Use calm redirection: “Food stays on the table.” and provide a bowl for child to discard non-preferred food appropriately
Refuses to sit at table	Offer small meals, ensure a safe and height-appropriate chair at table, have sitting at the table as part of the mealtime routine (Example of a mealtime routine: wash hands, serve food, sit down with family, keep plate and utensils in sink, wash hands)
Refuses new foods	Keep offering at intervals without pressure (e.g. no comparisons or punishments if food not eaten), pair with familiar foods e.g. broccoli with cheese dip if child is learning to eat broccoli and likes cheese
Overwhelmed by smell or texture	Serve in small amounts, let child explore at own pace, involve child in safe food preparation processes (e.g. washing fruits and vegetables, mashing potatoes, beating eggs, serving food onto plates) while talking about food colour, texture and smell using age-appropriate vocabulary. During the mealtime itself, talk about other topics besides food e.g. about the child’s interests. This will help normalise a low-pressure setting for mealtimes.



3. Create a calm mealtime space:

Use child-sized chairs
and a foot rest



Turn off screens




Sit and eat together
as a family / group



4. Try this at home!

Make food exploration playful and stress-free!

For example: “Let’s see if this broccoli  is bumpy or smooth. Want to poke it with your finger?”
“It’s okay not to eat it yet. Just looking is brave!”

Food Exploration Game Ideas:

Food Rainbow



Explore fruits/veggies of different colours

Chef’s Assistant



Help with washing or plating food

Food Faces



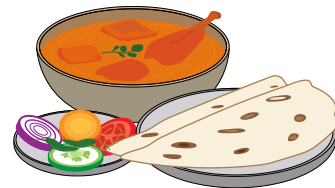
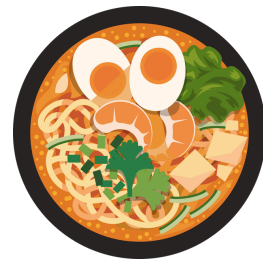
Create silly faces on plates with food pieces

5. Every Culture, Every Table

In Singapore, children grow up with diverse cuisines – that's a wonderful strength!

Encourage exploration of:

- Laksa without the spice
- Soft roti prata with dhal
- Chewy textures like mochi or chwee kueh



Key Message:

"We don't have to like everything, but we can learn about it."



Keep a gentle, encouraging tone. Each small step your child takes is worth celebrating!

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