

## Young toddlers:

- Have reasonable expectations of how long they can sit still. A high chair with a foot rest or a small table so their feet touch the ground can be helpful.
- Pickiness is an evolutionary safeguard, but still annoying.
- If they throw food, they're just doing science experiments. "Food is for eating. You're showing me that you're all done. I will put this in the kitchen." It's NOT a punishment.
- Let them bring a book or toy to the table if that helps.
- Part of meal time is learning the cultural and social aspects of eating.

## Older toddlers:

- Give them control where you can. Let them serve themselves or be the special salad server for everyone. Let them pick tonight's veggie or help with the meal plan (choose between two acceptable options, for example).
- Let them help set and clear the table (even if it's just napkins).
- Suggest, but don't bribe or shame. "Would you like another bite of the rice on your plate before you have more chicken?"
- Give them a small knife and let them try to cut their own food. [Curious Chef makes a kids' nylon kitchen knife set](#) so they can chop, too.

## Throw out some assumptions:

- When we tell kids they don't like vegetables, they believe us.
- Hiding vegetables in food doesn't teach them to like vegetables, it teaches them that they are unpalatable and need to be hidden.
- You can make meals kid-friendly without being a short-order cook or resorting to chicken nuggets. Make a deconstructed version, or just let them eat the toppings.
- New or unfamiliar foods can take up to 20 exposures before a child will try it. Keep offering without pressure.
- Telling kids about the benefits of healthy food or the drawbacks of junk food doesn't make a significant impact. Put veggies on the table or their plates and ignore them.
- The "clean plate club" and "just one more bite" override kids' natural body cues. Ask them if their tummy is full or still hungry, if they're done or just taking a break, or how their body will feel if they eat more to help them connect the dots.

The "picky eater versus problem feeder" chart I showed is from the [SOS Approach to Feeding site](#). These are all great resources!

## When we try to help wrong:

- Restricting a child to prevent overeating can cause anxiety about getting enough and actually trigger overeating.
- Pressuring a child to eat (often when concerned about slow weight gain) can cause power struggles and a refusal to eat.
- Labeling sugar as "bad" can cause feelings of shame when kids still WANT to eat sugar, because we're biologically conditioned to like it. Label it a "sometimes food," or ask how they feel when they eat too much of it, but restriction can cause what we're trying to avoid.
- When we engage in a power struggle, we make our child our opponent, and if one of us wins, the other must lose. We're on the same team.

## A few ideas for getting kids involved in choosing healthy foods:

- Take them shopping at the store or farmers market. Ask their opinion about produce.
- Plant a garden, even if it's just herbs on the windowsill, or sprout beans or legumes.
- When age appropriate, let them "help" you cook - chopping veggies, stirring, etc.
- Involve kids (when possible) in meal planning, even if it's just one meal a day.
- Give kids access to healthy snacks they can serve themselves.

FIGURE 8.2 PORTION SIZES FOR CHILDREN

	Ages 1-3 years	Ages 3-5 years	Ages 6-8 years	Ages 8+ years
Meat, poultry, fish	1-2 Tbsp	1 oz	1-2 oz	2 oz
Eggs	1/4	1/2	3/4	1
Cooked dried beans	1-2 Tbsp	3-5 Tbsp	5-8 Tbsp	1/2 cup
Pasta, rice, pota- toes	1-2 Tbsp	3-5 Tbsp	5-8 Tbsp	1/2 cup
Bread	1/4 slice	1/2 slice	1 slice	1 slice
Vegetables	1-2 Tbsp	3-5 Tbsp	5-8 Tbsp	1/2 cup
Fruit	1-2 Tbsp or 1/4 piece	1-2 Tbsp or 1/4 piece	1-2 Tbsp or 1/2 piece	1-2 Tbsp or 1 piece
Milk	1/4-1/3 cup	1/3-1/2 cup	1/2-2/3 cup	1 cup
Fats and oils	To appetite	To appetite	To appetite	To appetite
Sugars and sweets	See text	See text	See text	See text

Note: Children may eat more or less, but this is how much you can serve them to start with.

What is currently your biggest struggle with mealtimes?

What is your goal for feeding your child?

How did your parents handle mealtimes and food?

What eating habits do YOU have that you don't want your kids to have?

What are you doing now that ISN'T working?

What new approach are you willing to try?

Remember that this isn't an overnight "fix," but these approaches can help you relax. You're already doing at least 90% of it right!