

## The Way to Get a Kid to Eat is to not Try! (Feeding Picky Eaters)

*When we asked you recently to tell us your biggest child-feeding concerns, a majority of you said “feeding picky eaters!” We asked Family Child Care provider Julie Giles to help you. Julie has been a WECA Food Program provider since 1997 and was happy to share her personal experiences and recommendations with you. NOTE: As always, you are welcome to share this resource with your child care parents.*



### The Basics of Promoting Healthy Eating Behavior

At some time, I hear this from every provider I visit. And, I, too, have experienced this as a provider.

Ellyn Satter, in her book “How to Get your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much” reminds us adults that we are often encouraged to “overrule” information coming to us from children. If mealtime at your house is allowed to become a battleground, what will that do for your relationships with the children in your care? Will they feel loved and supported, or will they feel manipulated and managed? Will you and the children look forward to eating together, or will you tense up and prepare for the next standoff?

### Follow the Chain of Command

Satter states that adults “are responsible for what is presented to eat and the manner in which it is presented. Children are responsible for how much and even whether they eat.” If you take care of your job, which is preparing and serving the food, and allow the child to take care of his or her job, mealtime will go more smoothly.

- If the child doesn’t eat at that mealtime, regulations state that another meal or snack will be offered within three hours. No child will suffer starvation in the interim (although children may act as if they are!).
- Stand your ground. Be careful not to resort to becoming a short order cook, serving up a variety of tasty tidbits to meet everyone’s preferences. Take your part of the job seriously.
- Explore family-style dining. Many children can serve themselves and take as much or as little of a food as they are comfortable with. You will sit with the kids and eat what they eat. For more information, go to <http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100917033202.pdf>.

## Consider Your Objective

At one point in my daycare career I had six children, most of whom I could have described as picky eaters. Planning for mealtimes was a serious, serious mission. I made it my objective to have at least one item on the plate that each child would eat, and I planned to have enough of that food so that each child could have seconds of his/her preferred food. I also tried to introduce something new several times per week. It might have been an entirely new food, a new texture, or a new preparation.

- Some providers build the introduction of new food into their child care curriculum. They give the children opportunities to see the whole fruit or veggie, to touch and hold it, to read about it, or to grow it. This is a great way to help children learn to appreciate the nature of food.
- Cooking foods together is a great way to make food preparation a group event. You can build enthusiasm about food, develop good habits around sanitation and food safety, and easily illustrate science and math concepts in a way that is engaging and fun.

## Become Allies

Young children fear anything new. Expect that new foods will be regarded with natural suspicion.

- Children, especially those ages two and three, will need many experiences with a food before they may actually choose to taste it. This is also good information for parents to know as children make the transition from baby foods.
- Try to keep in mind that this is part of children's natural growth and development.

## Join the Ranks

- When children see us eating a variety of healthy foods with appreciation and pleasure, it sends a message that can't be ignored. Lead the exploration of healthy eating and good nutrition by being an example. You are perceived by the children as all-wise and all-knowing. For examples, if you drink milk and enjoy it, it must be good!
- Avoid the power struggles that result when we exert pressure.
- Plan for positive mealtime experiences. By treating children's development with respect and trust we will all emerge healthier, happier and victorious.

*Ellyn Satter is an internationally-recognized authority on eating and feeding. To read her "[Division of Responsibility in Feeding](#)" (English), [click here](#). For the Spanish version (*División de la Responsabilidad Alimentar*), [click here](#). For more resources, including books, go to [www.ellynsatterinstitute.org](http://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org).*



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.