
Teaching Toddlers Good Food Habits

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, “Teaching Toddlers Good Food Habits” from UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Discuss ways to introduce healthy foods to young children while making mealtime enjoyable.
- ◆ Identify ways to partner with families to promote healthy attitudes towards mealtime for young children.
- ◆ Plan to support young children’s good food habits at home and within the learning environment.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ Use the questions below to reflect on how you can partner with families to promote children’s healthy attitudes towards mealtime.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support toddlers’ healthy habits.

“Toddlers continue to learn many new things during mealtimes: how to hold utensils and cups and feed themselves, the taste and texture of new foods and how to decide when they are hungry or full.”

UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the article? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ The article provides tips for introducing new foods to young children. This is an important area where families and educators can collaborate to help children enjoy a variety of foods and feel confident to try new foods. Reflect on how you currently communicate and collaborate with families.
 - How do you and families communicate about children’s dietary needs, food preferences, and any new foods they’re trying?
 - How do you introduce new foods to young children? What strategies do families use to introduce new foods at home?
 - How do you learn about families’ strategies for introducing new foods to children at home? How could you implement those in your learning environment? Consider how you may introduce new foods to children by implementing some strategies that families use at home.

- ◆ The article also describes ways to make mealtimes pleasant for everyone. Having pleasant mealtimes can also be a goal shared by educators and families.
 - What are some ways you help children have positive experiences during meals? What challenges do you currently experience during mealtimes with young children?
 - What successes or challenges do families experience during mealtimes at home?
 - How can you partner with families to share ideas and experiences to make mealtime a pleasant experience for children in every setting?

- ◆ The article outlines strategies for developing children’s healthy attitudes, such as allowing children to feed themselves as much as possible and refraining from forcing them to eat foods they dislike. These ideas, however, may not align with every family’s values, dietary needs, or mealtime practices. Because families play a critical role in teaching healthy habits to young children, it may be helpful to ask families to share their effective strategies for developing healthy food habits with children.
 - How can you learn about families’ unique dietary needs and their mealtime values and practices?
 - What specific steps may you take to partner with families to promote children’s healthy food habits while respecting their unique situations and values?
 - How can you invite families to share ideas with you and other families?
 - Implement the steps identified, monitor children’s development of healthy habits, and adjust your support as needed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about teaching healthy habits:

- ◆ **Source:** Zero to Three
- ◆ **Article:** Top 5: Mealtime Tips for a Healthy Start
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/top-5-mealtime-tips-for-a-healthy-start/>
- ◆ **Description:** This article outlines mealtime tips for promoting healthy eating habits in infants and toddlers. It includes responsive feeding guidelines to support caregivers in promoting a healthy start for young children.

- ◆ **Source:** National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- ◆ **Blog:** Let's Eat Well
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/lets-eat-well>
- ◆ **Description:** This blog shares tips for promoting healthy eating habits in young children as well as online resources with healthy meal ideas.

- ◆ **Source:** National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- ◆ **Article:** Healthy, Fit Families
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/healthy-fit-families>
- ◆ **Description:** This article shares practical ways caregivers can promote healthy habits in young children. Suggestions such as following nutrition guidelines, limiting screen time, and encouraging physical activity are outlined.