

## recommendation

Make mealtimes both enjoyable and pleasant to promote healthy eating habits for picky eaters.

## why?

It is normal for children to say no to new foods. It can take 10 to 15 times of being exposed to a food before a child decides if they like it or not. Some children are especially cautious about trying new foods, while others use food as a means of control. Use the strategies below to minimize struggles with trying new foods.

## how?

- Encourage, but do not force, children to try and taste new foods
- Do not just offer "typical" child foods (e.g. hot dogs, macaroni and cheese or chicken nuggets)
- Have a taste-test when introducing a new food. Children can vote yes or no to liking the food and provide insight into why (taste, texture) they do or do not like the food
- Try to avoid mealtime power struggles. If a child refuses to eat what is served, make a gentle reminder of the next meal and/or snack
- Cut sandwiches, pancakes and waffles into fun shapes

- Dip it, spread it or top it. Serve dip with crackers, toast, rice cakes or cut-up fruit or vegetables. Some ideas are:
  - cottage cheese or plain yogurt dip
  - peanut butter or cheese spread
  - tomato sauce or applesauce topping
- Make foods fun and call finger foods playful names:
  - apple moons (thinly sliced)
  - avocado boats (a quarter of an avocado)
  - banana wheels
  - broccoli trees (steamed broccoli florets)
  - carrot swords (cooked and thinly sliced)
  - cheese building blocks
  - egg canoes (hard-boiled egg wedges)
- Invite children to be "Chefs in Training" and help with food preparation. Allow them to tear and wash lettuce, squeeze juice from oranges, stir batter or make fruit parfaits
- Maintain open communication with families. Welcome families to tell you about the foods they traditionally eat at home and their child's experience with eating and trying new foods. Explain the program's goals around healthy eating, and discuss and problem solve obstacles faced during mealtime
- Incorporate families' favorite foods into your menus. Consider a healthy variation when applicable

*"We had one child that was not very excited about the brussels sprouts we were having at lunch, but after trying them, he ate two helpings of them. His mom is one of our teachers and I remember him yelling over to his mom 'I love brussels sprouts!'"*

– Bridget Magadanz, ThedaCare Child Learning Center, Appleton

## sample policy

- We will serve a variety of foods in creative ways that are appealing to children. We understand that picky eating is a common childhood behavior. We will encourage, but never force, children to try and taste new foods. We will do our best to make mealtimes an enjoyable experience and incorporate foods that reflect the diversity of our families' cultures.