



Making mealtime pleasant



Oklahoma Cooperative
Extension Service

Deana Hildebrand, PhD., RD,LD, Associate Professor & Extension Specialist
Christine Walters, RDN, LD, MS, Extension Program Assistant
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Nutritional Sciences Department, Oklahoma State University

Like reading, writing, brushing teeth and hand washing, learning table manners is a life skill that can help your child live a healthful, satisfying life. Here are some ideas for helping your child learn good table manners and make your family meals more enjoyable.

Help your child be successful in eating and feeding themselves.

- Use child size dishes and utensils.
- Serve beverages in cups they can get their hands around.
- Sit your child on a booster seat so they can easily reach the table.



Create a pleasant mealtime environment

Turn off the TV. Play soft, soothing music. Ignore the ringing phone or put your phone on silent. It is unlikely to be an emergency. The caller can leave a message and you can return the call later.

Keep mealtime conversation light and pleasant

Mealtime is not the time to scold or nag your child. Talk about events that happened during the day. Be sure everyone takes a turn. Plan a weekend outing. Talk about the food: its colors, flavors and textures.

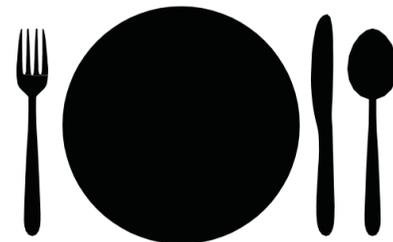


Explain the rules

Have clear and consistent expectations for how your child acts at the dinner table. Your child wants to please you. Make sure they know what is expected of them.

Realistic expectations for young preschoolers:

- Sitting at the table for at least 10 minutes.
- Using utensils some of the time, fingers some of the time.
- Understanding that he or she cannot take food from other's plates.
- Asking to be excused when finished.
- Understanding that once the child is excused, they cannot return to the table to eat later!



Realistic expectations for older preschoolers:

- Put a napkin in his or her lap and use it properly.
- Use a spoon and fork well.
- Use words and phrases such as, "please pass the bread" and "thank you for lunch."
- Say "no thank you" instead of "yuck" if offered a food he or she does not like or is not willing to try.

Be tolerant of spills and childlike eating skills

In other words, "don't cry over spilled milk." Remain calm and simply ask your child to help in the clean-up. Helping to clean the mess teaches the child that he or she is able to solve problems and deal with messy situations.

Avoid power struggles

Do not force issues and start an argument. Manners don't have to be white china and candlelight perfect. If your child isn't eating, remember your job is providing healthful foods at meals and snacks. It is your child's job to decide how much or if to eat. If they are not hungry or unwilling to eat at the table, they should be excused until the next scheduled meal or snack.

Be a good example

Remember, your child learns by watching you and older children. They will copy your behaviors. Follow the rules you make for your child. If you want your child to have good table manners, they need to see you practicing good table manners.

Reviewed by: Jenni Kinsey, MS, RD, LD & Hasina Rakotomanana, MS.

References:

Satter E. *How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much*. Bull Publishing. Boulder CO. 1987.

Duyff RL. *American Dietetic Association Complete Food and Nutrition Guide*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken NJ. 2006.