

Tips for Parents of Young Children



Parenting.
Give it time.

Meal times

(suitable for 1-5 years)

It isn't always easy to get the family to sit down to enjoy a meal together. But it is worth the effort. Sharing family meals gives everyone a chance to catch up and enjoy each other's company. Watching you and other family members eat a range of foods can encourage your child to try new foods.

Research suggests that children who have meals with their family do better in lots of ways, including being healthy and doing well at school.



Choosy (fussy) eaters

It can be very frustrating when your child refuses to eat certain foods or refuses to eat at all. It's perfectly normal for toddlers to do this.

Messy Eaters

It is normal for children to be messy when they are learning to feed themselves. As they get older, their muscles and coordination will improve, and mealtimes will be less messy.

Children love to play with their food and this is one of the ways they learn. Letting young children play with their food – even if they make a mess – helps them to be better and healthier eaters when they're older.

Here are some ideas which may help:

- **Let your child decide how much to eat.** Toddlers have small stomachs and can't eat much food at one time. Give them small portions and praise them for eating, even if they only manage a little. Offer healthy snacks, like fruit, between meals.

- **Offer your child a few different things to eat on their plate to encourage them to eat.** You may be tempted to offer your child treats just so they 'eat something'. If you offer fatty, sugary or salty snacks instead of healthy foods – your child may become fussier because they know they will be offered other options.
- **It helps to have meal times at a similar time every day.** Try to have meals before your child gets too hungry or tired to eat.
- **Your child may not eat the same amount each time.** Just like you, some days your child will be hungry and other times they will be less hungry.
- **Get your child involved in preparing the meal.** Your child will love doing this and it may help them to try new food.
- **Let toddler's feed themselves.** Give a toddler finger foods (cut food into strips or fingers) and let your child use their hands rather than a spoon or fork. In the early days of learning to eat, your child will find this easier to manage.
- **Let older children serve themselves and have limited choices** – “do you want broccoli or green beans?”.
- **Give them the same food in a different way.** Your child may refuse cooked carrots but enjoy raw carrots cut into sticks.
- **Ignore the fussing as much as you can.** If you give your child lots of attention when they are fussy or refusing food, it may encourage them to keep behaving that way. Instead be positive and calm and praise them when trying new foods.
- **Avoid distractions.** Try to switch off the TV and eat at the table away from their toys or other distractions.
- **Handle accidents in a calm way.** Your child's skills are still developing, so spills are likely to happen. Meal time messes will be easier to clean up if you put some plastic or newspaper under your child's (high)chair.

There is more information about what to feed your child and ideas for meals on the **Change 4 Life website** (change4lifewales.org.uk).

For more helpful tips on meal times and on positive parenting techniques, visit: gov.wales/giveittime