

No More Food Fights

The key to calm, positive meal times is a healthy feeding relationship with an appropriate division of responsibilities between children.

According to registered dietitian and child feeding expert Ellyn Satter:

- Adults are responsible for the foods and beverages that are served. They are also responsible for where the meal is eaten and for making meal times pleasant.
- Children are responsible for deciding whether to eat and how much to eat. As they get older, they can learn age-appropriate manners and meal time behaviors.

Here are ways to have meals without squeals and avoid unpleasant food fights with your children:

Make Regularly Scheduled Meals a Family Priority

Young children need the reassurance of structured meal and snack times. Eating on the run can be okay for adults but it does not work for children well. Whether you are eating at home or at a restaurant, take the time to sit down and eat with your child.

Avoid Pressuring or Forcing Children to Eat

Most adults have good intentions when they try to make children eat "healthy" foods or try new items. The problem with pressuring doesn't work. Kids like foods less if they are forced to eat them.

Model the Habits You Want Children to Develop

Young children do not automatically know how to eat like "big people." They learn how to eat and how to behave at the table by watching their most important role model for developing lifelong, healthy eating habits: you.

Enjoy the Foods You Want Your Children to Enjoy

Children learn to eat new foods by watching other people eat and enjoy them. If you want a child to eat green vegetables, you must eat green vegetables. Serve them regularly in a variety of appealing ways. Talk about how good they taste and how they make you feel smart.

Create a Relaxed Atmosphere for Meal Times

The best family meals have minimal distractions. This means turning off the TV and cell phones. Music can provide a pleasant background for meals if it is played at low volume and doesn't drown out conversation.

Have Realistic Expectations for Meal Time Behavior

It takes time for children to master new skills like table manners. Adults need to lay out clear expectations for meal time behavior to reinforce appropriate behaviors. For example, tell your children they will have to leave the table if they continue misbehaving.