Picky Eaters

Remember:
Most children are picky about what they eat at some point.
All children have likes and dislikes of their own.
A child who is picky may be one who reacts to changes in texture, temperature, or taste.

Picky Eating Problem Solving and Observation Tactics:

Does this child eat well at times? Eating patterns of young children are sporadic. They may prefer a food one day and then claim that it is “yucky” another day. Healthy children have different calorie intake needs. They are good at regulating the amount of food they need. Let the children decide how much to eat.

Are there certain foods (or food groups) this child prefers over others? Children prefer foods with less pungent flavors. Keep the child’s preferences in mind and offer at least one thing you know he/she likes at the meal. Accept a child’s dislike of certain foods as personal preference and DO NOT FORCE. New foods need to be introduced as many as ten times before a child considers them familiar and is likely to eat them.

Is this child hungry? A child’s stomach is about the same as his/her fist; as a result, he/she needs smaller amounts of food but more often throughout the day. Do not let the child fill up on water, milk, or juice before the meal.

Does this child play with her food by touching it or pushing it around on her plate? Playing with food may suggest that the child is full or uninterested. Expect messes as a child learns to eat. Learning what foods are and how to feed yourself is a messy job. Promote an understanding and interest in food by allowing children to help in the preparation and serving of the food. Use books and activities to inform children about food.

Is this child too busy to eat? When children are busy they have difficulty concentrating on their meal. Establish mealtime routines and behavioral expectations. Warn children ahead of time that mealtime is approaching. Engage children in a calming activity prior to meals.

Is this child begging for foods not offered? Set limits about begging for things. Say, “We will be eating what is offered; I know there are things here you like and can eat.” Set limits about commenting on their dislikes. Teach children to say, “I don’t care for that.” or “No, thank you.”

Is this child expressing his/her independence at the table as well as in other areas of her life? Young children are looking for ways they can express their independence and individuality. They love to be offered choices. AVOID POWER STRUGGLES. Offer healthy choices by saying, “Would you like Cheerios or Rice Krispies.”

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