

PICKY EATERS:
*Help! My Child Only Eats French Fries!
Only From McDonalds!
And Only in the Restaurant!*

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You are Not Alone!!

- Feeding problems are common
- Estimated prevalence ranges from 33-80% of children with developmental delays display some type of feeding problem
- Common concern of all parents of children under 3

Types of "Picky" Eaters

- Does not consume enough food
 - Eats a variety but only in small amounts
- Does not eat a variety of food items
 - Has a strong preference for specific type, food group, texture, brand, prepared a specific way, etc.

First Steps

- TALK TO YOUR PEDIATRICIAN!
- Must rule out a medical issue for food selectivity or refusal before a behavioral intervention is introduced

Extreme Cases

- Failure to Thrive
 - Weight for age below the 3rd percentile on two or more occasions
 - Can be related to physiological issues (e.g., cystic fibrosis, celiac disease)
 - Majority of cases are not related to physiological issues

Behavior Management

- How behavior is managed throughout the day carries over to mealtimes
- How we “set the stage” or help “trigger” the behavior we desire in our toddlers throughout the day can help at mealtimes

Setting the Stage

There are MANY things that we can do that will **SET THE STAGE** for appropriate behavior (e.g., following directions, using language) rather than inappropriate behavior (e.g., not following directions, engaging in tantrums).

An Environment that Sets the Stage for “GOOD” Behavior

Provide as much structure and predictability as possible... Routines

Signal Transitions

Provide Choices

An Environment that Sets the Stage for “GOOD” Behavior

Model Appropriate Behavior

Provide Frequent Attention, Assistance, Supervision, and Proximity

Provide Clear-Cut Rules

Deliver "Good" Instructions

Be Clear and Concise
Give One Instruction at a Time
State natural contingency (or payoff)
Don't Ask; Tell
Tell What TO DO; Not What NOT TO DO
Be Prepared to Intervene

Delivering Good Instructions

Examples of BAD Instructions:

1. What are you doing with that truck?
2. Can you give the toy to your sister?
3. I think it is time for you to go to bed
4. Be careful
5. Put your trains in the toy box and all the books on the shelf and go get your shoes so we can get ready to go to dinner.

Delivering Good Instructions

Examples of Good instructions

1. John, please give me the truck
2. Lindsay, go wash your hands
3. Cooper, please hold my hand while we walk
4. Tiffany, please eat 3 more bites of chicken
5. Taylor, please give the toy to your brother

Setting the Stage - Embedding Instructions

Children are more likely to comply when directions or requirements are “embedded” in a fun context or activity

Setting the Stage - Embedding Instructions

Examples:

A favorite toy action figure watches and comments while child brushes teeth

The Clean-up Song

Why is He Doing That?

- Our children engage in behavior because
 - The Stage Has Been Set
 - **A Payoff is Expected**
- The Payoff increases the likelihood that the behavior will occur more frequently

Consequences

The **PAYOFF** can be gaining access to things we like or value

The **PAYOFF** can be avoiding or escaping situations we do not like

How Should I “Pay it Off”

Catch ‘em Being Good!

Use Behavior-Specific Praise

Adhere to Contract/Rules Previously Stated

No Payoff for Inappropriate Behavior

How Should I “Pay it Off”

Do Not Make Idle Threats

Do Not Give A Lot of Warnings

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

What you do is much more important than what you say

How Should I React?

PICK YOUR BATTLES

Ignore Inconsequential
Behavior... even though it
might be annoying

Behavioral Feeding Interventions

SET THE STAGE to trigger appropriate
mealtime behavior, e.g., acceptance of
non-preferred foods or consumption of
designated portion of food

DELIVER A PAYOFF for appropriate
mealtime behavior and **WITHOLD
PAYOFF** for inappropriate behavior

Setting the Stage

Present meals at the table and at scheduled
times. No grazing!

Do not offer an unlimited amount of
preferred foods or drinks throughout the
day. Most kids will eat if they are hungry!

Identify a mealtime reward.

Provide A Clear-Cut
Mealtime Rule....
and stick to it!

FIRST Non-preferred, THEN Payoff

Positive Reinforcement

- The systematic use of incentives (payoffs) to increase the likelihood that the desired behavior will occur more frequently

Principles of Positive Reinforcement

1. You do not know whether a stimulus will be a reinforcer until you try it and determine its effect on the response.
2. What may be a reinforcer for one child may not be a reinforcer for another child.
3. Positive reinforcement is most effective when delivered IMMEDIATELY following the response you are trying to strengthen/increase.

Principles of Positive Reinforcement

4. Reinforcement must be CONTINGENT: the child must engage in the target response to receive the reinforcer.
5. When strengthening or teaching a new response, reinforce frequently.

Basic Intervention (Non-Severe Cases)

Goal: Eating an age-appropriate portion of food at meals

- No eating between meals
- Routine, scheduled meals requiring child to sit at table
- Ignore other inappropriate mealtime behavior
- Identify a special reward

Basic Intervention

Teach your child the mealtime rule by first presenting a small portion of food. Set a timer. If s/he eats the small portion before the timer sounds, present the reward.

Once s/he learns the rule, gradually increase portion size across days/weeks.

Formal Intervention for Food Selectivity

- If
 - Problem Persists for Years
 - Child eats less than 7 different food items
 - At risk for nutritional deficiencies
- First step – Collect a Dietary Record
 - Record everything child eats for three days including portions, brand names, and time of consumption

Food Selectivity

Goal: Eating a greater variety of foods

Teach your child the mealtime rule by first presenting a small amount (i.e., one bite) of a *preferred or neutral* food. Set a timer. If s/he eats the bite before the timer sounds, present the reward.

Food Selectivity

- Initial Steps
 - Target food item is similar to preferred food
 - One, dime-sized portion
 - Timer
 - Select a Treatment Meal and only implement at that meal
 - Multi – component payoff: Special reward, regular mealtime food, no more target food

Food Selectivity

- Sit child at table with dime-sized portion
 - Special reward and regular meal in view
- Set timer for approximately 5 minutes
- If child eats target food item before timer engages, deliver the special reward and regular meal
- If child does not eat the target food item, announce that the meal is finished and dismiss him from the table.

Food Selectivity

- If child does not eat the target food item, announce that the meal is finished and dismiss him from the table.
- Approximately 30 minutes later, repeat procedure.
 - Child receives no food during the 30-minute "break"

Food Selectivity

- Initial objective is to teach the child that the new "rules" of the target meal
- Once child is consuming the first target food item consistently (i.e., on the first attempt, several days in a row), increase portion size but always maintain the predictability of the protocol (i.e., child must finish the portion set out)

Food Selectivity

- Repeat entire process with second target food item
- Attempt to incorporate first target food item into other mealtimes
- Each successive target food item should be more “challenging” = different than the preferred food items that were recorded in the initial dietary record

Additional Strategies

- Escape from Non-preferred activity
- Escape Extinction
- Behavioral Pediatric Feeding Units
 - Munroe Myer Institute in Nebraska
 - Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore
 - Marcus Institute in Atlanta

Other Issues to Consider

- These strategies are not intended to promote compliance with a highly restrictive diet (e.g., to teach a child to like gluten-free items)
- The child’s overall health, including but not limited to height and weight, must be continually monitored by a pediatrician

Other Issues to Consider

- There is a natural pattern of “pickiness” in most toddlers; while some issues with picky eaters are serious, many are not.
- Our goal is for a child to be able to eat from a typical children’s menu (i.e., a parent does not have to carry around special food, prepared in a specific way, etc.)
