

Kids Eat in Color

FROM STRESS TO SUCCESS

4 ways to help your child eat better
without losing your mind



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Feeding kids is tricky!

I know. Even though I'm a dietitian, I've stood in the pediatrician's office and heard her say, "He's not gaining weight." I've had to work hard at helping my own picky eater thrive. I know the day-to-day grind.

Maybe you feel defeated and stressed. You may have cried because mealtimes are so hard. You might feel alone. You're worried about your child.

Are they getting what they need? Will their relationship with food be okay? Will this picky eating thing just go away? Is it "normal"?

My team and I can help. I have specialized expertise in picky eating and a team of occupational/feeding therapists, dietitians, psychologists, child educators, and eating disorder specialists.

There's a team of us because picky eating can be mild and relatively easy to improve, or it can be complicated and can only be improved with therapeutic feeding tools. Picky eating can affect a child's health. Plus, your child's relationship with food needs to be protected and nurtured.

We're here for you, to help you find out if your child's picky eating is typical or not, to help you improve mild picky eating, or to help you learn therapeutic feeding techniques. We're here to help your child have a good relationship with food. We can provide you with current, evidence-based tools.

We're also here to remind you that what your child eats does not define your success as a parent. You haven't failed your child.

We know you'll find valuable tools in this guide. As you start using the 4 steps with your child, remember that we're rooting for you!

~ Jennifer Anderson, MSPH, RDN
Founder, Kids Eat in Color



Improving or managing picky eating can be simple or complicated.

A lot depends on how picky your child is. This guide will help you get your bearings on your child's picky eating. It will also give you some tools to start using at home to make eating more positive.

Let's get started with 4 ways to start your child on the road to eating more foods.

1. Find Out if Your Child's Picky Eating is Typical or Not

First, take the [Picky Eating Screener](#).

When you know if your child's picky eating is typical or not, you can find the right strategies for them. We created a [picky eating screener](#), used by health professionals, to help you find out. There are 3 types of picky eating that we see.

1. Typical Picky Eating

A child with typical picky eating is likely experiencing what many children experience.

While typical picky eating can worsen over time, it is also straightforward to improve with most children.

2. Atypical Picky Eating

A child with atypical picky eating is likely experiencing worse picky eating than most kids. This puts them at a higher risk of nutritional deficits

or social challenges. It also puts parents at risk of higher levels of stress. Of course, parents of atypical picky eaters don't usually need me to tell them that!

When parents have high levels of stress, they may be more likely to try things that make picky eating worse. There's no judgment. Virtually all parents have done it (even I've done it, and this is my specialty!) Trying things, whether or not they help, shows that they are doing something, which is the first step to making improvements.



Atypical picky eating can progress to more serious picky eating. It can also be improved. If parents have a toolbox of more specialized picky eating strategies and therapeutic feeding techniques, they can manage it and get their child on the road to trying new foods.

3. Problematic Picky Eating

A child with problematic picky eating is likely experiencing much worse picky eating than most children. They are at high risk of nutritional deficiencies and social challenges.

[Take the picky eating screener now.](#)

Parents of problematic picky eaters tell us they feel defeated, frustrated, alone, and worried. They are almost always stressed about what their child is eating.

As with atypical picky eaters, parents may be more likely to try things that make picky eating worse. Again, there's ZERO judgment. This just means they are trying things, and parents need to try things to see improvements.

Problematic picky eating does not commonly resolve on its own. Managing or improving problematic picky eating often requires parents to learn specialized picky eating strategies and therapeutic feeding techniques or even do 1:1 feeding therapy.

Find out what kind of picky eating your child has.



Is it your fault?

Often parents of atypical and problematic picky eaters worry that they have failed their child. They worry that perhaps they could have fed them differently as an infant or a toddler or done something else.

Be encouraged. It's not your fault that your child has more serious picky eating. Picky eating is complicated. Picky kids have more hurdles on the inside than most kids.

The research on picky eating so far has shown many potential causes, including fear and anxiety, genetics, neurodivergence, allergies, nutrient deficiencies, medical experiences, mental health, and more!

Even if parents of picky eaters, especially complicated picky eaters, had done everything "perfectly," it is very likely that they would still have a picky eater!

Before you continue to the second strategy, I highly recommend taking the quick Picky Eating Screener to find out what kind of picky eating your child has.



2. Eat Together

Eating with your child can be a very powerful help when it comes to picky eating, regardless of what type of picky eating your child has.

When you model eating foods in front of your child, they can also learn to eat foods. Research studies suggest that modeling eating food for your child is one of the most effective things you can do when it comes to picky eating!

A “family meal” is any time an adult eats with a child. This can happen any time of day, any meal, or any day of the week. Look for how eating together can be made a part of your family’s routine. It will look different for every family!

Family meals can also help kids sit at the table and focus on eating for a minute, which can help picky eating a lot!



Sitting at the table is a common problem for a child with any type of picky eating.

Here's a method for helping your child sit at the table:

1. Start with 1 min. per year of age.
2. Set a sound timer.
3. Have them sit until the timer goes off, then let them get down.
4. Increase the time by 1-2 minutes every day.
5. Increase until you reach their attention span. The length will vary widely by child, and it might be only a few minutes at first.
6. Once you find their attention span, switch to a sand timer like the one pictured on the right. It will help them "see" how long they need to sit.



Sitting support

Additional sitting support during meals can benefit some picky eaters. Ideal height and foot support can help them feel stable so that they can focus their energy on eating. A foot support can provide needed stability for some children. They will ideally have their elbows and knees at a 90-degree angle.

Foot support as simple as a diaper box is fine, or you can use a chair with adjustable foot support like the chair on the left.

3. Serve the Foods You Want Your Child to Eat

If you never serve a food, your child will never eat it.

One reason children can become more picky over time instead of less picky is because parents try feeding the child a food once or twice, and then they give up.

It's completely understandable! No one wants to waste food or make things their child always refuses.

Even typically picky kids often need many "exposures" before they will eat a food. Atypical and problematic picky eaters may need hundreds of exposures!

Exposures can be anything from looking at a new food to chewing and swallowing it.

One of the things we do as a Kids Eat in Color community is food "exposure months." Each month, we feature a food for kids to try, and people send in their ideas for recipes and fun food activities. You can join in on social!

If you have taken the Picky Eating Screener and know what type of picky eating your child has, you can adjust your expectations as to whether your child will likely need a lot of exposures or not.

WISH YOUR CHILD WOULD EAT BROCCOLI?



Textured purees



Spread on toast



Soft steam-roasted



Whole head of broccoli



Served with dips



Steamed with flavorful butter

Kids Eat in Color

Regardless of how picky your child is, it's just a fact that we can't give up. We need to keep serving foods over and over and over...and over!

"Microportions"

To reduce food waste from picky eaters, remember, you don't need to give your child a full serving of a food you know they won't eat.

A "microportion" is about the size of a pinky nail, such as one pea.
Microportions have two benefits.

First, they reduce food waste! Wasting one pea is not as big of a deal.

Second, microportions are less overwhelming to the child. If you really dislike peas, having a big pile of them on your plate is grounds for a tantrum!

When there is only one pea on your plate, however, the experience is manageable. Many kids won't think this is a big deal.

Of course, to some children, even one pea will be the end of the world! For those children, just leave the peas off their plate altogether! It still "counts" as an exposure if it's off their plate.



4. Make Eating Fun!

Many kids have no reason to learn to like foods because they have no interest in food! Here are some ideas that you can use to help your child be more interested in mealtime.

Colors and Shapes

For some kids, if you give them a new food in a bowl that is their favorite color, it can be a game changer!

Shapes also add novelty to meals. Before I had kids (when I was at the peak of my parenting game), I said I would “never” cut my kid’s food into cute shapes. Not only did I find shapes to be a huge help when I actually had kids, now I tell other families about it as a strategy to consider!

Colors and shapes are “extra.” You don’t have to use them to do a great job feeding your child. For some families they can be a lot of fun and help.

Here are some of the most popular cute food cutters & silicone muffin cups among parents in our community:



New Utensils

I've seen my kids eat food they never would have eaten before just because they had a new utensil! Many kids love to learn to use new utensils.

Many typical, atypical, and problematic picky eaters enjoy new utensils. For some children, this novelty can revive their interest in eating. It's hard for a child not to want to have some food in front of them so that they can use their new fork!

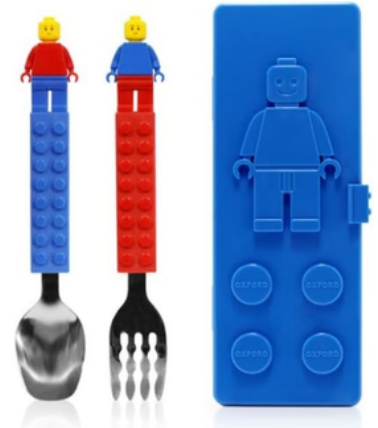
Plus, if you have 2 or more types of utensils that your child can choose from, it adds an element of choice for your child.

Having the ability to choose something can make meals more enjoyable for some children and sometimes even help a child feel more comfortable trying a new food.

Take the [quick Picky Eating Screener here](#).



Click each to
see on
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Start Now.

Picky eating can be a long game for some families. Whether you think your child is typically picky or if it's something more, now is a good time to find out for sure.

Know that even if your child is 2 or 5 or 10, it is not too late to address your child's eating. It's a good idea though, to start working on your child's eating as soon as works for your family. Doing so can help decrease everyone's stress and prevent some picky eating from worsening. It can also start your child on the road to trying more foods.

Start by taking the Picky Eating Screener. It takes less than 2 minutes and will help you know how to move forward.

Cheering you on,

Jennifer

