


# Six Reasons Your Child Might Refuse Food: Guide for Training Child Care Providers

## Overview:

Food refusal is a common phase nearly all toddlers go through. Just as they are eating more like older children and adults, toddlers seem to suddenly start eating less in both quantity and variety. The *Six Reasons Your Child Might Refuse Food* materials describe some of the challenges encountered when feeding a toddler. Knowing more about the reasons toddlers refuse food can help to alleviate some of the frustrations that come with caring for a toddler.

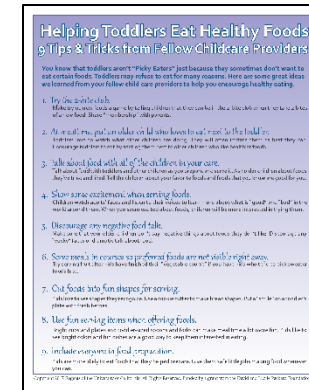
## Materials:

- ◇ Video – Food Refusal
- ◇ Provider Handout (double-sided) 
- ◇ Parent Handout (single-sided, see next page)

To access the materials, visit

Website: <http://lactation.ucdavis.edu/baby-behavior-in-child-care/>

Password: BBCC2017



## Tips for sharing with childcare providers

- ◇ Begin by talking about how even as adults we refuse foods for a variety of reasons, based on previous experiences, tastes, preferences, or how messy a food is. Toddlers are starting to eat more like adults while going through some developmental changes that make food refusal more common. Find which of the 6 Reasons can be used to explain what might be going on when a toddler refuses the food that they are served.
- ◇ Share video and Provider Handout with the provider. Talk about the tips and concepts in the materials that might be most useful to the parents of the children that they care for.
- ◇ Help the provider identify specific opportunities that they have to share messages with the parents of the children that they care for, such as pick up and drop off times when updating parents on the activities of the day, in newsletters or calendars or when parents ask questions. The UC Davis study showed that they often send updates of feeding to parents during the day, a great way to share information with the parents.

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## Highlights

- It is normal part of development for toddlers' appetites to change day to day
- Reasons for food refusal (related to 6 Big Changes):
  - Slowed growth
  - Practice using fingers
  - Practice skills like walking and standing
  - Memory improves about likes and dislikes
  - Easily distracted
  - Learning from others
- It is an instinctual drive for toddlers to practice new skills. Toddlers will sometimes want to practice so much that they have trouble eating and/or sleeping
- Toddlers start to remember things they like and dislike
- A parents' reaction to foods may influence the whether the toddler tries new foods

## Ideas for Sharing Opportunities

- If a parent mentions difficulties at mealtime, talk about the reasons why this could be happening.
- As the toddler starts going through these changes, bring them up to the parents. Use their toddler as the example.
- Some providers share feeding information to parents throughout the day. Messages can be shared this way as well.

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### Six Reasons Your Child Might Refuse Food

It's normal for your toddler's appetite and food preferences to change day to day or even meal to meal. It is a phase most toddlers go through. Here are 6 reasons why your healthy toddler might refuse to eat foods that you offer.

**Her growth has slowed down.**  
Her appetite might change from day to day because she is not growing as fast as she did when she was younger. She won't need to eat more and more as she gets older. Try not to worry when she won't eat very much at one meal. Instead, pay attention how much she eats over a few days.

**He must learn to use his fingers.**  
He needs practice using his fingers, so he will insist on feeding himself. While it might take a little longer, and be a lot messier, letting him feed himself is a great way to get your toddler to eat more AND get important practice. Try giving him foods that are safe to eat with his fingers.

**She needs to learn how to stand & walk.**  
Sometimes, your toddler will want to practice pulling up, standing, and walking more than she wants to eat. Practicing these new skills is important! Try to make lots of time for practice between meals and snacks and sit and talk with her while she eats.

**His memory is getting better & better.**  
As your toddler gets older, he will get better at remembering foods he likes, foods he doesn't like, and who normally feeds him. He will also know when a food is new to him. He may have to see a food a few times before he will try it. He might refuse a food if he sees something else he likes. Keep foods you aren't serving for a meal or snack out of his sight and offer new foods over and over until he gets used to them.

**She is easily distracted.**  
Your toddler can't tune out the sights and sounds around her. If she's distracted by the TV or other activity nearby, she may not be able to focus on eating. Sitting with her, limiting noisy distractions, and having a mealtime routine can help your toddler stay focused.

**He thinks you don't like the food.**  
Your toddler learns a lot about the world by looking at your face and hearing your voice. If you smile and seem relaxed, he will be more likely to try a food than if you frown or look upset. Seeing you or other children eat new foods can help him be more interested in trying them too.

It can be confusing and frustrating when your toddler won't eat. But now that you know several reasons why, you'll know what to do to make meals and snacks a lot less stressful for both of you.

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