

# HELPING PARENTS WHEN TODDLERS WON'T EAT

Parents may think their toddlers are “Picky Eaters” when they don’t want to eat, but there are many reasons toddlers may refuse food. You can help parents understand their toddlers by sharing these ideas:

## 1. *Slower growth means appetite will vary*

At around 9 months, babies begin to grow more slowly than they did earlier. Slower growth means they don’t have to keep eating more and more each month. It is normal for toddlers’ appetites to change from day to day. It might take toddlers several days or a week to eat a variety of foods.

## 2. *Toddlers like to “get to know” their food*

Toddlers learn by using all of their senses. They want to inspect, touch, and smell foods before they will eat them. While it is messy to let toddlers explore foods, it will make it easier to get them to accept new foods in the long run.

## 3. *Toddlers can remember foods they like*

Toddlers get better and better at remembering people, places, and things in their lives. Toddlers remember foods that they like and they will want those foods all the time. It can make mealtime easier to keep preferred foods that aren’t on the menu out of sight.

## 4. *Toddlers MUST use their fingers*

Toddlers must learn to use their fingers to pick things up and to feed themselves. Sometimes toddlers will refuse to eat unless they can pick up the food themselves. It is a good idea to have healthy and safe finger foods ready when feeding toddlers.

## 5. *Toddlers are easily distracted*

Toddlers are easily distracted by things going on around them, like by TVs or other children playing nearby. It can make meal time easier to remove distractions. Toddlers can focus on their food better when parents and other children sit and talk with them about what they are eating.

## 6. *Toddlers want to learn and play*

Toddlers are learning all the time. They learn by exploring and looking at faces and listening to voices. Toddlers are more likely to try foods they see others eat and like. They must also practice new skills like standing and walking. Toddlers will eat more if they have time to play before mealtime and someone to sit and talk with them while they eat.

# Helping Toddlers Eat Healthy Foods

## 9 Tips & Tricks from Fellow Childcare Providers

You know that toddlers aren't "Picky Eaters" just because they sometimes don't want to eat certain foods. Toddlers may refuse to eat for many reasons. Here are some great ideas we learned from your fellow child care providers to help you encourage healthy eating.

### 1. Try the 2-bite club.

Make trying new foods a game by telling children that they can be in the 2-bite club when they take 2 bites of a new food. Share "membership" with parents.

### 2. At mealtime, put an older child who loves to eat next to the toddler.

Toddlers love to watch what other children are doing. They will often imitate them as best they can. Encourage toddlers to eat by seating them next to older children who like healthier foods.

### 3. Talk about food with all of the children in your care.

Talk about food with toddlers and other children as you prepare and serve it. Ask older children about foods they've tried and liked. Tell the children about your favorite foods and foods that you know are good for you.

### 4. Show some excitement when serving foods.

Children watch adults' faces and listen to their voices to learn more about what is "good" and "bad" in the world around them. When you seem excited about foods, children will be more interested in trying them.

### 5. Discourage any negative food talk.

Make sure that your older children don't say negative things about foods they don't like. Discourage any "yucky" faces or dramatic talk about food.

### 6. Serve meals in courses so preferred foods are not visible right away.

Try serving fruit after kids have finished their "vegetable course" if you have kids who tend to pick sweeter foods first.

### 7. Cut foods into fun shapes for serving.

Kids love to see shapes they recognize. Use a cookie cutter to make bread shapes. Put a "smile" on a toddler's plate with fresh berries.

### 8. Use fun serving items when offering foods.

Bright cups and plates and toddler-sized spoons and forks can make meal time a lot more fun. Kids like to see bright colors and fun dishes are a good way to keep them interested in eating.

### 9. Include everyone in food preparation.

Kids are more likely to eat foods that they helped prepare. Give them safe little jobs making food whenever you can.