



# Mealtime "Best Practice"

BEST PRACTICE DOESN'T MEAN *ALL OF THE TIME*. LIFE WITH AN INFANT OR TODDLER CAN BE HARD! THESE ARE STRATEGIES TO *STRIVE FOR* TO HELP YOUR CHILD BE A MORE CONFIDENT EATER AND HELP YOUR FAMILY ENJOY MEALTIME TOGETHER!

- Create a **calm eating environment**, free from distractions (e.g. no screens).
- **Eat meals together** and even it's just one caregiver. Children learn from watching good mealtime habits!
- **Stick to the menu**. Don't make a new meal or leap to get new foods; children can eat at the next food opportunity.
- **You choose** *what* foods to serve and *when* to serve it, **they choose** *how much* and *if* they eat it. This division of responsibility respects a child's ability to learn when their stomach is full and when they are hungry.
- Offer **3-4 food options** at a time to allow them to make their own choices. Include **1-2 "safe"** or familiar foods per meal.
- Let your child **explore foods!** Children first learn about a food's qualities by touching and getting messy. Wait to clean hands and face until the end of the meal.
- Encourage your **child to feed themselves**. Offering pre-loaded spoons and modeling taking bites helps develop independence and motor skills.
- Stick to a **family mealtime schedule**. If a child isn't hungry at one meal, they will learn that there is another meal coming soon. It's helpful for children to feel slight hunger between meals.
- It's a marathon, not a sprint. **Be patient**. It takes time and many mistakes to master the skills required for eating.
- If your child refuses to eat or throws their food, **keep calm and don't show your child it's upsetting you**; instead, try to determine what they are trying to communicate in that moment, it might be a sign they are done with their meal!
- **Trust your child!** Creating a safe environment for a child to learn hunger cues and explore new foods, supports confident and happy eating behaviors.