Welcome to Positive Parenting Approaches for Picky Eaters, brought to you by Dairy Council of California.

Today, we’ll focus on how to feed your picky eaters.

We’ll talk about how to deal with the challenges that go along with having picky eaters.
We’ll look at how we eat and serve food.
We’ll talk about developing healthy eating habits.
We’ll give you tips that you can use to get your picky eaters to accept more foods.

You know it’s important for you and your children to eat healthy foods, but how often does this turn into a power struggle over what to eat?

Parents of picky eaters worry when their children refuse to eat certain foods.

What concerns does this raise for you as parents? (pause for answers)

Some parents have asked:
- Must they cook separate meals for their picky eaters?
- Is it okay for their kids to reject vegetables?
- Will their kids get the nutrients they need?
- Will their picky eaters be underweight?
- What if these picky eating habits last into adulthood?

To address these questions, we’ll talk about how to best feed your kids rather than what to feed them. This may sound unusual because it gives you less control over what your children eat. However, by relaxing your food rules and trusting your children to feed themselves, they will develop a healthy relationship with food that will last a lifetime.

How you approach feeding your children makes a big impact on how they eat.

Do you allow your children to eat whatever they want? (pause for answers)

Do you choose and therefore control their every bite? (pause for answers)

Many parents are permissive; that is, they buy and serve the foods their children demand. On the other hand, some parents are controlling. These parents “hover” over their children, constantly watching what and how much their children eat. They make sure their children follow specific rules about eating the foods the parents think are best. For example, they might make sure their children finish the vegetables before dessert is served.

Do you feel guilty any time you deny your children’s food requests, or are you nervous that they are not getting enough food? These are signs that you could be permissive.

On the other hand, if you feel that this type of strict monitoring is necessary to make sure your children are eating healthfully, you might be controlling.

Both types of parenting could benefit from some adjustments because both approaches can lead to unhealthy attitudes about food and even cause excess weight gain in children.
We will discuss how you might adjust your parenting style to be midway between permissiveness and full control through responsive parenting.

Write: (stop and write the following on a board or poster paper, if available)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What to serve for meals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• When to serve meals</td>
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<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Whether to eat</td>
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<td>• How much to eat</td>
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</tbody>
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Read: To avoid food battles with your children, keep in mind as parents you can:

• First, have regular meal and snack times and stick with those general times. Allow your children to decide whether or not to eat and how much they would like to eat. This is the most important point and the basis of what is written on the board. **Presenter, point to the board.**
• Second, trust that your children know when they are hungry or full and allow them to make the decisions about what they’ll eat. Do not pressure your children to eat.
• Third, try not to call foods “good” or “bad” and instead let your children know which foods are healthy choices by eating them yourselves.
• Fourth, make meal times pleasurable. Do not put pressure on your children to accept all the food choices.
• Bottom line is that you want to create a successful eating experience.

Read: We’re not suggesting that you give up all control. Here are some tips for how to become a “responsive” parent:

• Research has shown that young children often dislike new foods. Bring a wide variety of foods into your home and allow your children the freedom to make choices.
• Make sure to keep healthy foods in sight, like a bowl of fruit or a plate of cut veggies. Put yogurt or string cheese at eye level in the refrigerator.
• At meals, allow your children to serve themselves.
• Encourage them to taste new foods by allowing them to take those foods out of their mouths if they don’t like them. Do not reward children for trying new foods.
• Don’t make a separate meal for your children because this fails to set limits. Instead, make sure at least two different well-liked foods such as bread, fruit and milk are available.
• Do not force or bribe your children to eat; do not punish them and do not reward them with food.
• If your children don’t want to eat at the meal, ask them to keep you company at the table and then have them wait for food until snack time or the next meal. They will make up for what they don’t eat.

Ask: What meal ideas do you have that might appeal to picky eaters? (pause for answers)

Read: Here are suggestions for vegetables:

• Make them the first course (such as a salad).
• Serve with dip or melted cheese.
• Top salads with croutons, cheese, corn, beans, nuts, dried fruit or sliced hard-boiled eggs.
**Read:** For fruits:
- Make them the first course or dessert.
- Pair new with familiar fruits.
- Add a sauce or topping like granola.
- Serve yogurt with berries on top.
- Grill fruit such as pineapple.

**Read:** Give vegetables and fruits fun food names like X-ray carrots, green trees (broccoli), flying onions (pearled), apple cookies (sliced apples), green butter (avocado) or princess peas.

**Ask:** What fun food names do you use at home? (pause to give parents a chance to share)

**Read:**
- You can also make food fun by using toothpicks to eat sliced pears. You can have kids use chopsticks instead of a fork to pick up meat, cheese or steamed vegetables.
- As babies we are naturally attracted to sweet foods. This is because bitterness can be a signal of potentially poisonous food. Kids have to build a preference for bitter foods, so don’t be afraid to slightly sweeten foods. Use a sweet dressing on vegetables and top meats with a sweet-and-sour or teriyaki sauce.

**Read:**
- Many children don’t want to take time to eat a snack at recess because they just want to play. Here are ideas for snacks from the five food groups that kids can carry in their pockets while heading out to recess. For Milk & Milk Products, try string cheese or squeeze yogurt. Try Vegetables like carrots, celery or jicama in a bag, and for Fruits try a box of raisins or a bag of apples. Good Grains are pretzels or graham crackers in a bag. Portable foods in the Meat & Beans group are packages of nuts.
- At home, mix up the snack choices with a quesadilla, fruit smoothie, cheese or peanut butter with crackers, raw sliced vegetables with hummus or Ranch dip, and chocolate milk with graham crackers and peanut butter.

**Read:** Here are some easy tips for appealing to everyone at the dinner table:
- Serve pasta with the sauce on the side. This allows picky eaters to try a little sauce or skip it if they prefer.
- For salad, put lettuce in a bowl and put other salad fixings such as shredded carrots, diced tomatoes, avocado, shredded cheese and celery in separate bowls. Offer dressing on the side. Allow members of the family to create their own unique salads.
- Try a taco bar. Using the same idea, provide the tortillas and taco shells by themselves and put all of the taco fixings in separate bowls: sour cream or plain Greek yogurt, shredded lettuce, diced tomatoes, ground beef, shredded cheese, salsa and diced green onions. Let your family members make their tacos the way they like.
- Have a pizza night where the kids put their own toppings on before the pizza goes in the oven.

**Ask:** What meal ideas do you have that might appeal to picky eaters? (pause for answers)

**Read:** By offering healthy choices at the table and allowing your children to eat within those choices, your children are likely to increase the variety of foods they eat. Here are some tips for helping them along.
- Pair new foods with familiar foods. For example, melt cheese on unfamiliar vegetables or offer ranch dressing or a yogurt dip for raw vegetables.
- Don’t panic if your children like green beans one day and push them to the edge of the plate the next day. This is normal. Continue to serve green beans and a variety of other foods within the five food groups. Allow your children to try a vegetable raw but also try different cooking methods such as grilling, roasting, boiling or baking.
- Allow time for kids to accept a new food. Don’t give up if your children reject a food 10 or even 20 times. Continue to serve and enjoy it at the table until it’s familiar enough for your children to try. When they finally ask to eat a food that has been rejected in the past, it is important not to make a big deal. Pass the plate and let them serve themselves.
- If your children say they’re full, don’t force them to eat more.
- Your children will watch you and eat the things you eat, so set a good example and eat a wide variety of foods!
- Remember, your goal isn’t to make them eat healthfully at every single meal but rather to teach them to have a healthy relationship with food that leads to lifelong, healthy eating.
Ask: But what about dessert? Are you supposed to allow your kids to eat as much sugary food as they want?

Answer: No. But you can try making dessert a part of the meal, putting it on the table during dinner so your children can eat it when they want. By allowing children to have the dessert whenever they choose, it’s no longer a goal or reward at the end of a difficult task such as “eating your spinach” or “cleaning your plate.”

Read: Speaking of dessert, do you have any off-limit foods that you would never allow your children to eat? Having off-limit foods may make those foods more desirable to your children, which may cause them to eat forbidden foods at friends’ houses or even sneak foods into your house.

Read: Instead of forbidding foods, introduce them to your children without judgment. If you and your children eat healthfully most of the time, allow yourselves those forbidden foods once in a while. Develop a relationship with your children in which they ask for these foods rather than sneaking them.

Ask: Would anyone like to share some of their forbidden foods and how their children react when they cannot have those foods? (pause for discussion)

Read: Because food is so widely available outside the home, it’s unlikely that you’ll be able to keep forbidden foods away from your children. Making sure no foods are off limits creates a healthy relationship with food in the long term.

Read: After everything we’ve talked about, what do you think is most important at mealtime?

Read: Surprise! It’s YOU!

Read: Eating as a family is the most important thing you can do to encourage healthy eating. Enjoying food as a family and trying new foods together will lead to a lifelong, healthy appreciation for food— which studies have shown to be associated with healthy body weight.

Read: Make mealtime a team effort.
  • Work together to plan some meals and lunches each week.
  • Allow your children help you prepare meals and snacks. Start with something simple such as washing fruits and vegetables, using plastic knives to cut. Advance to simple cooking tasks such as toasting bread.
  • Kids take great pride in what they’ve made and will be more willing to eat food that they helped to prepare. Encourage your older chefs to make a meal that includes all five food groups.

Read: Family meals are a great time for conversation, teaching kids table manners and modeling good eating habits.

Read: Think about how your attitudes toward food and eating affect your kids. Are there ways you can change? Consider what you can do to be more responsive in your eating and less permissive or controlling. (pause for them to think)

Read: It may take some time to get your picky eaters to eat new foods, but stick with it. Your persistence will make your whole family healthier and happier in the long run.

Read: Thank you for participating in Positive Parenting Approaches for Picky Eaters, brought to you by Dairy Council of California.

Here are additional resources for more information on creating a positive eating environment for picky eaters. Pass out any handouts that are available.

You can download tip sheets like this one on snacks at www.DairyCouncilofCA.org in the Handouts section. You can also have your children’s teachers order lessons for their classes to learn about nutrition and eating. These programs are free to California teachers.

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