



Feeding, Eating And Supporting Together
TO HELP CHILDREN GROW AND THRIVE

PLAY WITH A PURPOSE

Why *Playing* with Food Can Lead to *Trying* New Foods



You've likely heard the popular saying, "**Don't play with your food!**" But, contrary to popular belief, playing with food is actually a wonderful way for kids to learn about and discover new foods in a fun, low pressure way. Here is why!

- 1** Trying a new food can be stressful. If you introduce a new food through play, you **remove the pressure** and anxiety of having to take a bite and eat it.
- 2** Playing with food allows kids to explore foods from a different perspective. It goes beyond just using utensils and eating it. Food play encourages **creativity and interaction** with food in a non-confrontational way.
- 3** Being **messy** is an important part of learning to eat. Kids **learn through play** and food is no exception! Playing with a purpose teaches kids about the different properties of food. Let them feel it, smell it, squish it, mash it, and talk about it. Is it dry and crunchy? Wet and sticky? Smoot? Sweet/salty? Does it melt in your mouth?
- 4** The sense of taste and smell are closely connected to each other when we eat. If kids get accustomed to the smell of food, that's one step closer to **eliminating the "unknown"** and eventually taking a bite.
- 5** Food play supports the **hand-to-mouth connection** that is a natural part of development (starting with finger feeding at 8 months!). From a sensory standpoint, both our hands and mouth are highly perceptive to texture. Exploring food with their hands can help a child become more comfortable with all its sensory properties. If they won't touch it with their fingers, they most likely won't eat it.

Ideas for Playing with Food

There are endless ways to play with food in fun ways. Remember, it is **“play with a purpose.”** The purpose is to provide your child with low pressure ways to **learn about foods**, just like they do with new toys. The way you play can range from playing with food on the plate, to getting messy with food in a non-meal setting. However you present it, make sure your child is **able to eat the food** if they choose to!

“Paint” with fruits and veggies (e.g broccoli and carrots, asparagus, etc.), using various condiments (ketchup, ranch dressing, mustard etc) as the “paint.” Paint pizza sauce on pizza dough. Paint yogurt onto fruit.



Cut foods into different shapes-use cookie cutters to cut our shapes in sandwiches, tortillas, cheese slices etc.



Use different shapes of cooked pasta to match to shapes on a placemat or stack (e.g. wagon wheel pasta), make tunnels to put peas through, practice cutting long spaghetti noodles with kid-safe scissors



Play with assorted cooked beans. Load them up in small dump trucks, mash them up in a garlic press, fill up small containers, etc.



Encourage your child to help prepare and help serve foods with you (pouring, stirring, scooping etc.)



Make faces on pancakes, rice cakes, crackers. Draw them on or use small foods such as cheerios, beans, or peas.



Use ziploc bags to squish, mash, poke, and pat foods such as avocado to make guacamole, steamed apples to make apple sauce, or cooked potatoes to make mashed potatoes

Need more ideas?

Check out kids cookbooks ("Cooking Art" or "Easy Edible Art for Young Children") or check out Pinterest for endless possibilities!