Making Mealtime Pleasant

Making mealtime as pleasant as possible for the toddler while providing supervision and encouragement is a constant challenge for both parent and child care provider. The term toddler is generally applied to children between the ages of eighteen months and three years because they are learning to walk and frequently “toddle” around on wobbly legs. However, age is less important than the developmental and social growth of a child. During the toddler stage many important things are happening to the child like walking, talking, problem solving, relating to others, and much more. Toddlers are learning to be independent and this is why they want to do things for themselves. The parents and child care providers will hear the word “no” many times during this stage.

In asserting their independence, toddlers may decide what foods they “will” and “will not” eat. Frequently these food likes and dislikes change daily or weekly. Regardless of this, parents and child care providers can help children form sound eating habits by offering nutritious food choices and modeling good eating habits.

When planning meals, consider the flavor of the foods. Young children usually dislike strong flavors; toddlers do not want their foods to be too hot or too cold. When introducing new foods, do so with old favorites. Start out slowly and give the child some control by offering choices. For example, ask which vegetable they would like for dinner — either the carrots or the green peas.

During mealtime, sit with the toddler and eat the same meal. Have a positive attitude toward foods. Discuss what the foods are, where they come from, colors, textures, tastes, and the differences and similarities of foods you are eating.

Activity: Fishing for Food

Materials Needed:
Use a blunt stick, two to three feet long. Place a string on the end of the stick and tie a small magnet to the end of the string. Cut out pictures of foods. Select pictures of easy-to-identify foods like fruits, vegetables, and other foods you want children to learn about. Place a large paper clip on each picture.

Directions:
Let the children take turns fishing for food. When a food is “caught,” the child should tell the name of the food.

Source: CARE Connection
Choking
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention more than 2,800 people die each year from choking. Many are children ages 3 and under. Toys and household items cause the majority of these deaths.

However, the most common cases of nonfatal choking seen in hospital emergency rooms are caused by food. Parents and child care providers need to be aware of age-appropriate food, food preparation, and mealtime practices to reduce the risk of choking.

Tips for Preventing Choking in Young Children

Food preparation
- Cut foods into small pieces (less than 1/4 to 1/2 inch).
- Cut hot dogs lengthwise into thin strips.
- Cook carrots or celery until slightly soft; then cut into sticks.
- Cut grapes or cherries into small pieces.
- Spread peanut butter thin.

During mealtime
- Place a child at a table or in a high chair for all meals.
- Stay with a child while he is eating.
- Encourage small bites of food and watch for cramming of food into mouth.
- Praise a child when food is chewed thoroughly.
- Enjoy the mealtime experience with a child.

Foods that may cause choking include:
- Hot dogs
- Raisins
- Whole grapes
- Chips
- Raw celery
- Nuts and seeds
- Chunks of meat
- Round or hard candy
- Marshmallows
- Popcorn
- Cherries with pits
- Large pieces of fruit with skin
- Raw carrots
- Pretzels
- Peanut butter (spoonfuls)

Non-food items that may cause choking include:
- Coins, button-cell batteries
- Buttons (loose as well as those attached to clothing)
- Deflated or broken latex balloons
- Pencils, crayons, and erasers; pen and marker caps
- Rings, earrings
- Nails, screws, staples, safety pins, tacks, etc.
- Small toys such as tiny figures, balls or marbles, or toys with small parts
- Holiday decorations (including tinsel)
- Small rocks

Sources


