

Especially for parents of infants!

Feeding Frenzy!

Vocalizing and Listening

Meals can be especially good times to have “chats” between yourself and your young child. This handout includes ideas for how meals are chances for your child to listen, babble, and try out new words. They are also times to have your-turn/my-turn “talks” between you and your child.

What is the practice?

Talk to your baby and encourage him to “sound off” and gesture to you while eating. Family meals can be enjoyable times for listening and communicating. Your most successful “talks” might happen when you are feeding your child foods he especially likes. The more relaxing and enjoyable the activity, the more it will be a great time for talking.

What does the practice look like?

Imagine a hungry infant seated in a highchair or an infant seat. The parent says to the child, “It’s time to eat!” The baby becomes excited and opens his mouth. The parent asks, “Do you want some (child’s favorite food)?” The baby’s excitement grows. The parent feeds him while saying, “Yum, yum, good!” The back-and-forth flow of feeding time is filled with talking, babbling, gesturing, and lots of fun.



How do you do the practice?

Help your child become a “talking” partner. When you talk to your child, watch for how she tells you she is listening. You’ll be giving her chances to tell you things like “I want more.” “This tastes yummy.” “Talk to me some more.” And “This is fun” in whatever way she is able. The ways your child takes part in back-and-forth communication will depend on her age and interests.

- This activity works best when your child is hungry. Be attentive to your infant’s signals and signs that she wants to be fed.
- The activity also works best when you and your child are facing each other. Placing your child in a highchair, infant seat, or any other seat where he is at ease is important. If needed, use pillows or rolled towels to help him sit upright.
- Talk to your child in short sentences like, “It’s time to eat” or “I have your favorite food.” Try “Okay! It’s chow time.” Ask simple questions: “Are you ready to eat?” “Do you want more oatmeal?” The idea is to get your child excited about meal times.
- Pay attention to whatever your child does to “tell” you he wants more or wants your attention. Respond to any and all things your child does to get you to continue mealtime chit-chat. This might include gestures, sounds, or movements.
- Make the interaction fun and enjoyable. Don’t be afraid to play feeding games like using a spoon as a toy airplane!

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child tell you he wants to be fed by opening his mouth?
- Does your child communicate by getting excited or reaching out toward the food or spoon?
- Does your child vocalize to try to get your attention?

Take a look at back-and-forth fun at mealtimes

Favorite Food

If 8-month-old Ashley had her way, she would only eat applesauce! She bubbles with joy whenever she sees her favorite food. She coos, wiggles, and squeals with delight. Her mom knows that Ashley will “talk up a storm” during this meal. Ashley’s mom exclaims, “I have your favorite food! Applesauce!” Ashley immediately makes loud squeals and babbling. Mom puts Ashley in her highchair and says, “Open up. Here it comes!” Without hesitation, Ashley strains forward to taste her first mouthful. “You like that, don’t you?” her mother asks. Mealtimes turn into back-and-forth exchanges between mother and daughter. They each play their part during this happy time together.



Food and Togetherness

Six-month-old Nathan loves to eat. He’ll let you know in no uncertain way that he is hungry! Dad feeds Nathan while his son is in an infant seat placed on the kitchen table. Dad puts some rice cereal on a spoon and begins feeding Nathan. He asks, “Do you like that? Do you want more?” Nathan “says” yes by shaking his arms and moving his lips. Dad responds, “Let’s try some green beans. What do you think?” Next he says, “What about another bite? Is that a yes?” Dad continues asking Nathan questions and describing what he is doing. He involves his son in a your-turn/my-turn exchange throughout the meal. It is clear that Nathan not only likes his food but very much enjoys this father-and-son time together.

I’m Ready for More!

Three-month-old Nicole has had difficulties drinking from a bottle ever since she was born. Mom received advice from a professional who has helped her increase Nicole’s liquid intake. Mom has noticed that Nicole started looking at her bottle or at her mom while being fed. Mom started experimenting with feeding time to see if she could make it more fun and enjoyable for Nicole. With the baby nestled in her arms, Mom says, “It’s time for your bottle! Are you ready to eat?” Any time Nicole looks at the bottle or at Mom, she puts the nipple in her daughter’s mouth. After about four or five sucks, Mom removes the nipple and says, “That was good! Do you want more?” Nicole begins to make sucking movements and Mom again puts the nipple in the baby’s mouth. This has turned into a back-and-forth, your-turn/my-turn game. Nicole has figured out that looking, sucking, and making sounds gets Mom to give her more to drink.

