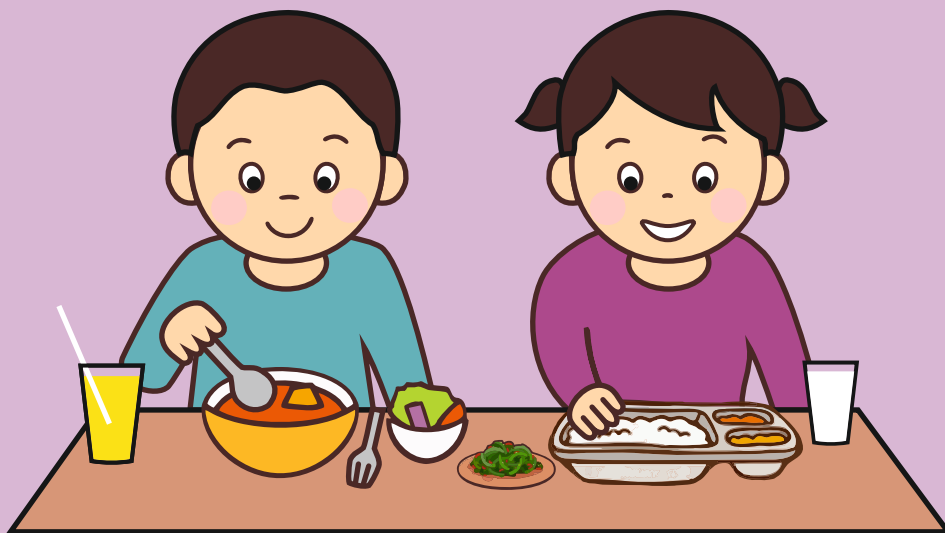


INDEPENDENCE IN SELF CARE ROUTINES

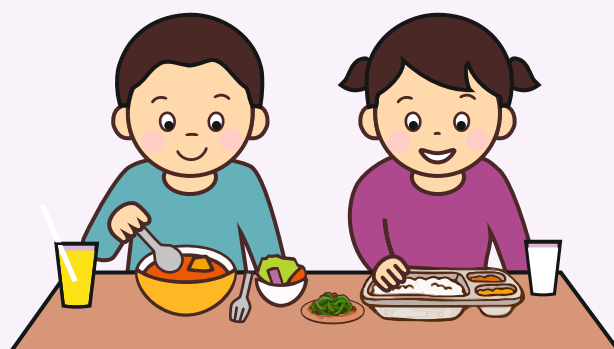
**A Curriculum for Professionals and Parents of
Children with Autism and Developmental Conditions**



MODULE 4 MEALTIME SKILLS

INDEPENDENCE IN SELF CARE ROUTINES

A Curriculum for Professionals and Parents of
Children with Autism and Developmental Conditions



Nidhi Singhal, PhD

MODULE 4 MEALTIME SKILLS



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Finally, we are honoured to receive the Foreword from Dr Wenn Lawson. An autistic advocate, a psychologist and a lecturer, Dr Wenn Lawson is a well-respected and highly knowledgeable expert on autism who has authored fifteen books and numerous papers, and regularly delivers keynote speeches and trainings at international events. Currently, Dr Lawson is a Teaching Fellow with Birmingham University's online Masters autism course. He is on the board of and an advisor to several educational and research councils in Australia. He has also been running his own business for more than 20 years now.

Thank You!

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The resources in this book are provided for informational purposes and are not meant to replace the judgement and training of parents and professionals.

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MEALTIME SKILLS

MEALTIMES are often a stressful time for parents of young children, with worries about their child's nutrition and eating habits, as they balance other things in their everyday lives. Many children with autism are more than usually restricted in their diet. This could be for a range of reasons. Some children with autism have strong preferences for foods of certain colours, smells, textures, or flavours, and may therefore seem selective eaters. As discussed in the *Overview*, some children with autism have oro-motor concerns and hypo- or hyper-sensitivities that amongst other things can make it hard to chew or swallow food and/or often lead to selective eating habits. Motor planning and coordination concerns can further make it hard for many children to eat neatly. Some children also have food allergies or underlying issues with digestion or constipation that impact their eating preferences and their eating habits.

Oftentimes, parents find themselves following the child trying to feed her or him and/or worrying about the child when in school or creches, because s/he does not eat her/his tiffin. Consequently, many parents continue to feed the child to ensure healthy, nutritious diet, and teaching the necessary skills assumes a lesser priority.




Some of these issues can be addressed with support from medical professionals and occupational therapists. Further, there are many effective routines that can be easily incorporated in everyday life that can make mealtimes positive learning moments. In addition to learning to sit and eat neatly, use cutlery and eating a range of food items, mealtimes are also marvellous opportunities to help the child practice motor skills, strengthen eye-hand coordination, and develop better awareness to understand their body signals such as for thirst, hunger, or overeating all of which are important for the overall development of a child.

Mealtimes are also a great time to complement the learning of concepts that are otherwise taught through books and pictures. So we can talk about fruits, vegetables, concepts of numbers or big and small or edible and inedible things. We can also talk about different colours, smells, textures, and flavours. Snack times and meal times also provide opportunities to foster communication such as teaching the child to indicate food preferences, likes and dislikes or ask for 'more' if they like something. And with several meal and snack times through the day, there are multiple opportunities to teach and hone these skills every day.

A child's mealtime skills have a significant impact on the child as well as the family. It is nicer for the family to enjoy a meal together, without having to fuss over the child. Enabling the child to eat neatly and independently also makes it easier for the child and the family to participate in social and community activities like birthdays, weddings and festivals, visiting family or friends, or just going out for a meal.

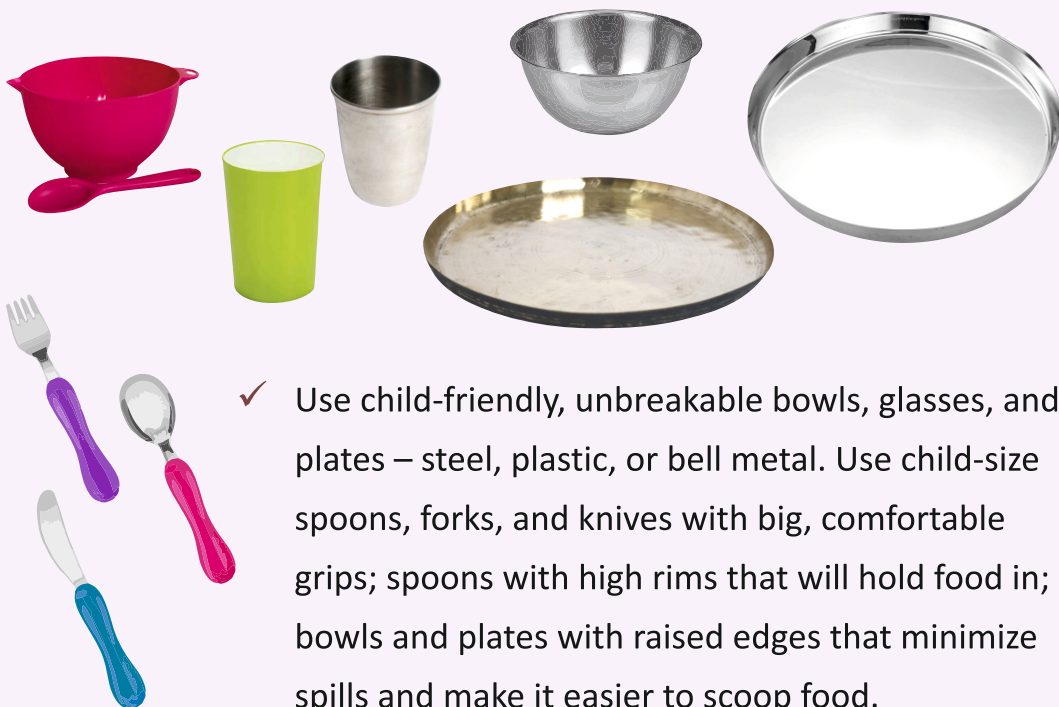
MEALTIME SKILLS

Here are a few things that can make mealtimes interesting, stress free and a positive experience for the child and the adults.

-  Choose the skills the child needs to learn. Children may not need to learn all the skills mentioned in this module. Decide the goals keeping in mind the child's age and learning pace. Understand the child's strengths and challenges. Review finger dexterity, hand strength to hold objects, how long can the child sit at a place, oral motor sensitivity, preferences for flavours and textures, amount the child eats etc. So, if a child finds it hard to touch soft or wet food such as rice and dal because of his sensory issues, the child can learn to eat using a spoon, or a fork, rather than by hand. Also review the family environment. So, if the family does not use knife and fork at mealtimes, it may not be a goal at all.
-  Use a highly favoured food item to teach a new skill. So, if a child really enjoys drinking apple juice, teach him or her to use a straw to drink apple juice.
-  Plan mealtimes.
 - ✓ Incorporate child's sensory and motor needs, interests, and preferences when planning mealtimes – the food as well as the space designated for eating.
 - ✓ If eating at the table, try and get a high chair for the child.




- ✓ If using a regular chair, place a cushion on the seat to raise the level. Have the child's feet rest on a footstool for stability if required.
- ✓ If sitting on the floor, ideally have a small stool in front to place the thali on. If required place towels or cushions on the sides to support the child. This will give the child a comfortable height to allow for easy arm and hand movement. Teach the child to bring food to mouth rather than stoop to eat food.



- ✓ Use child-friendly, unbreakable bowls, glasses, and plates – steel, plastic, or bell metal. Use child-size spoons, forks, and knives with big, comfortable grips; spoons with high rims that will hold food in; bowls and plates with raised edges that minimize spills and make it easier to scoop food.
- ✓ Give child opportunities to explore food. Use soft dry snacks such as puffed rice, raw peas, gems etc. that the child can pick up using his or her fingers and can swallow without biting. Let him attempt to scoop food. Plan for the mess the child makes. Have the child use a bib, towels, or other cloth, to avoid

MEALTIME SKILLS

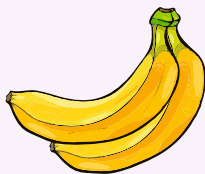
- ✓ staining the clothes. Use easy to clean large placemats, tablecloths, or sheets. If expecting high spillage then cover the floor with old newspapers that can be discarded.
 - ✓ Follow a consistent schedule for meals and snacks. Try and have it on her/his schedule to let the child know ahead about the mealtimes.
 - ✓ Have enough gaps in between so the child is fairly hungry.
 - ✓ Plan for the family to eat together whenever possible. They provide a great opportunity for bonding as well as for the child to observe and learn through imitation.
-  Introduce new food items gradually.
- ✓ Introduce new foods only when the child is moderately, not extremely hungry.
 - ✓ If the child is resistant to trying out new foods, try with food items that are similar to the texture they enjoy. For instance, if the child likes Halwa, try to introduce Upma or sweet Dalia in the same consistency.
 - ✓ Children are more amenable to trying out unfamiliar or non-preferred food when it is introduced in a small quantity and alongside preferred food items. Give the child a sip or bite of a desired food item as soon as she/he tastes a less desired food.

- ✓ Present the new item multiple times for the child to taste. One bite in a meal may be good enough if the child does not want any more. Bring it back at next mealtime.



Teach the child to bite or chew.

- ✓ Hold the food item at its edge (e.g. a slightly big piece of steamed carrot). Put the other end between child's side teeth so that the child can bite and chew on it.
- ✓ Have the child feed another person. Place child's hands on adult's cheeks as the adult takes a bite and chews food. This will let the child feel the jaw movement.
- ✓ Demonstrate biting and chewing with over-exaggerated movements.
- ✓ Have the child eat in front of a mirror so that the child can observe the jaw movements.
- ✓ Identify food items that the child particularly enjoys. For some children soft food items such as papaya and banana can help initiate chewing and biting actions. Gradually increase the hardness of the food.



MEALTIME SKILLS

- ✓ Consult an occupational therapist if the child finds it hard to:
 - close lips around a spoon or cup
 - drink from a straw
 - bite, chew or swallow food or drinks
 - eat specific textures (not flavours) of food such as hard (e.g. raw carrots), crunchy (e.g. chips, papad), very soft (e.g. dal chawal) etc.
 - hold a spoon, cup, or glass
 - guide food to mouth
 - resists using fingers to pick up or hold foods
- 🍽️ Avoid force feeding. It just makes the experience unpleasant for the child and the adult. Maintain a positive environment at mealtimes.
- 🍽️ Refer to other modules to identify activities that may be integrated alongside mealtime routines. For instance, the module *Personal Care* gives the steps to wash hands and mouth that may be incorporated before and after eating a meal.



DRINKING



DRINKING FROM A GLASS

WHENEVER the child is able to hold a cup or a glass for a few seconds, the child is ready to learn to drink independently from a range of cups, glasses and bottles of different weights and sizes.

Getting Started

🍷 Ensure everything you need is in place

- ✓ Favoured drinks
- ✓ Unbreakable cup or glass

Suggested Sequence to Teach

The following sequence is an example that may be individualized to the child's skill set and family environment.

- ✓ Sippy cup



- ✓ An open cup with handles on both sides



- ✓ An open cup with a handle on one side

- ✓ Glass



- ✓ Water bottle with a spout
(or a straw if the child can drink from a straw)





- ✓ Water bottle with a small mouth



Suggested Words to Use







1. Hold cup / glass (with one or both hands)
2. Open cap (if drinking from a bottle)
3. Drink
4. Close cap (if drinking from a bottle)

Teaching the Sequence

-  Focus only on one skill. When teaching the child to drink from a bottle, the adult may open and close the bottle cap, if the child struggles with it. Teach opening and closing the bottle cap as a separate activity.
-  Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.
-  Every child may not need to follow the suggested sequence. For instance, if the child has already been using a sippy cup without any handles, removing the lid can help the child use it as a glass directly. Some other children may find it easier to start drinking from child-size cups with large handles on both sides that are easy to grasp and that fit well into the child's hands.
-  Follow the child's pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually.

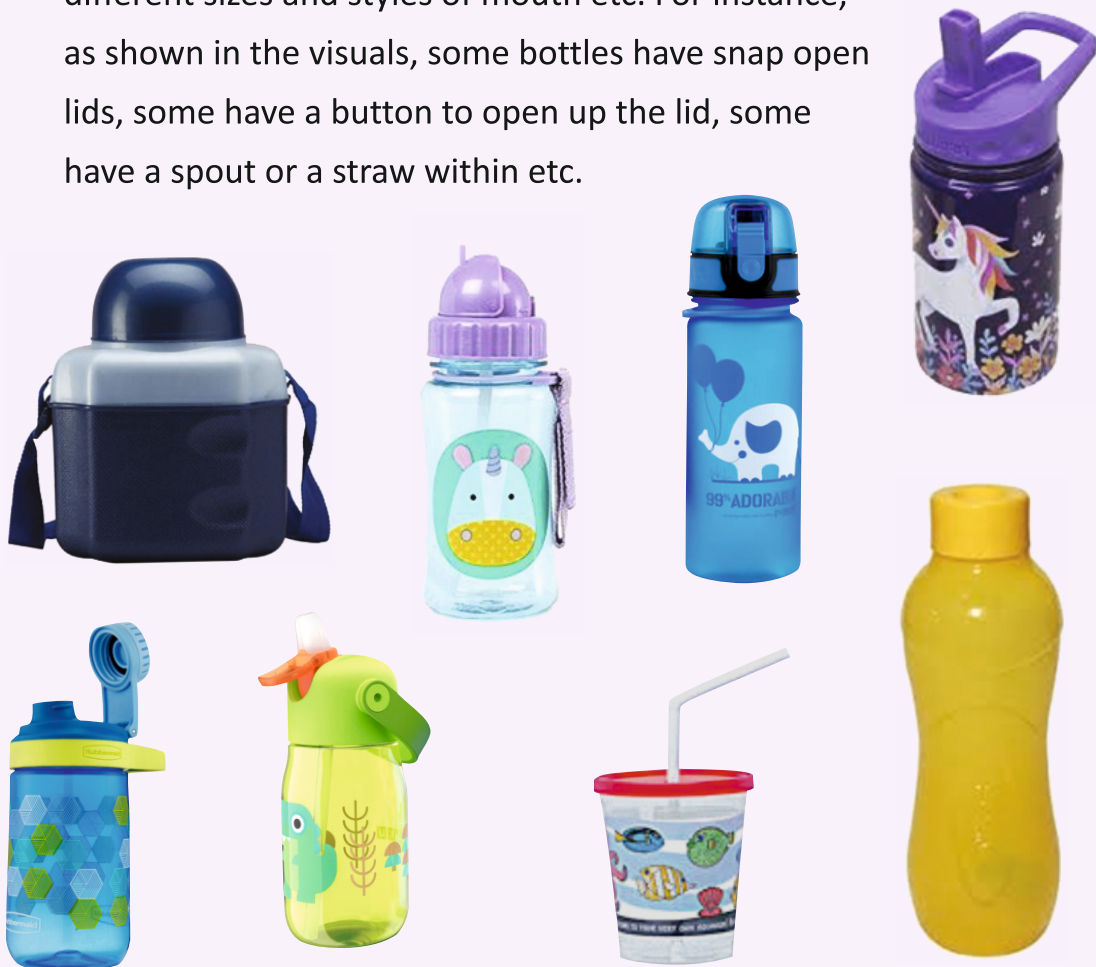
Things to Keep in Mind



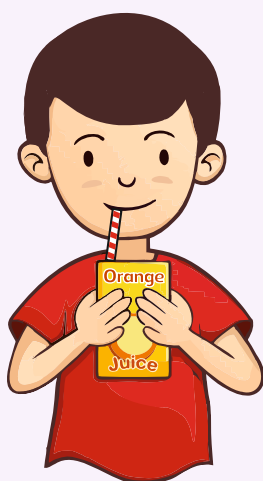
-  Summers are a great time to start teaching this skill with more opportunities to practice.
-  When introducing this, start with the child's favourite liquid. It could be juice, milk, flavoured milk, or even water.
-  If the child finds it hard to close lips around the cup, gently press the lower lip against the rim with your index finger. Additionally, consult an occupational therapist for suggestions on the kind of oral motor exercises that may be done.
-  Use shallow glasses or cups to begin with so that the child does not have to tilt his or her head back while drinking. Gradually practice with quantities and bottles where the child is required to tip head backwards to drink.
-  Try and control the flow of the liquid to enable the child to coordinate swallowing and breathing.
-  To make it a success, and minimize chances of spillage, start with an amount of liquid in the cup or glass that the child will be able to hold comfortably. For some children this may be 2-3 tablespoons only. Increase the amount of liquid to as much as the child is able to hold independently and comfortably.

DRINKING FROM A GLASS

- Practice with a range of unbreakable cups and glasses of different styles, sizes, and weight. When the child is ready, also practice with disposable glasses which are relatively light weight. This helps the child to estimate the different grips required to hold different kinds of items.
- Also, practice with a variety of water bottles so the child can learn to use a range of water bottles with varied styles to open the lid, different sizes and styles of mouth etc. For instance, as shown in the visuals, some bottles have snap open lids, some have a button to open up the lid, some have a spout or a straw within etc.




- Stay comfortable and support the child to wipe her/himself clean in case of spillage.



USING A STRAW

DRINKING from a straw may not be something that a child does at home on an everyday basis. Although, there may not be an urgency to teach this, it adds to a child's repertoire of skill sets, helps the child be independent in different social settings, and just as importantly it is a great oral motor exercise.

Getting Started

 Ensure everything you need is in place

- ✓ Favoured drinks
- ✓ Cup / glass / bottle
- ✓ Juice box (optional)
- ✓ Straw



Suggested Sequence to Teach

1. Teach the child to understand that liquid comes out of the straw. Some activities that may be done:

Activity 1:

Use straw with juice in a tetra pack. Squeeze the pack gently so some juice enters the child's mouth through the straw. Once the child gets the concept, gently press the box each time the child attempts to suck on the straw.

Activity 2:

Dip the straw in the liquid. Place a finger on the other end of the straw before taking it out of the liquid. This will allow some liquid to remain in the open end of the straw. Place this end of the straw (with the liquid) in the child's mouth. Now, remove your finger so that the liquid goes into the child's mouth. This will help the child get the concept that liquid comes out of the straw.

2. Practice drinking with a straw in glasses, cups, and bottles enough times so that the child is able to increase the duration of sucking.
3. Practice drinking fluids of different density. For instance, a thick milkshake is harder to drink from a straw than juice.
4. Practice with a straw in glasses, cups, and bottles that the child can hold independently.

USING A STRAW

Suggested Words to Use

1. Hold (with one or both hands)
2. Put in straw
3. Drink from straw



Teaching the Sequence

- 🍷 Focus only on one skill. When teaching the child to drink from a bottle, the adult may pierce the straw in a tetra pack juice box or open and close a juice bottle if the child struggles with it.
- 🍷 Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.
- 🍷 Follow the child's pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually.





Things to Keep in Mind

- Start with the child's favourite liquid. It could be juice, flavoured milk, coconut water or even plain water.
- Start with hard straws that do not get crushed if chewed on.
- You can even try flavoured straws. Choose a flavour that the child may enjoy.
- Cut a regular straw into half or less for ease of sucking. Once the child has learnt the skill, gradually increase the length of the straw.



- Limit the amount of liquid in the bottle to facilitate success.
- In the beginning, hold the cup and the straw so that the child can focus on the sucking action.
- Once independent, teach the child to slightly tip the glass, and adjust the straw to drink the remaining liquid.

USING A STRAW

-  Once the child is able to drink using a straw comfortably, teach them to pierce the straw through a container such as a juice box, if required.
-  If the child continues to find it difficult to use a straw, consult an occupational therapist for activities that may encourage the action.



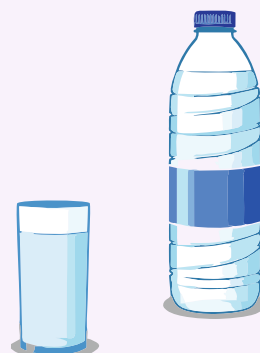
POURING FROM A BOTTLE

AN IMPORTANT SKILL to facilitate independence around the house, at mealtimes, in school and in social situations, teaching this skill may begin whenever a child is able to hold a glass or a bottle.

Getting Started

Ensure everything you need is in place:


- ✓ Favourite liquids
- ✓ Cup or glass
- ✓ Bottle





Suggested Words to Use

1. Open bottle (if required)
2. Hold cup (with other hand, if required)
3. Pour
4. Close bottle (if required)






Teaching the Sequence

-  Focus on teaching one skill at a time. If required, open and close the bottle cap and focus only on the child pouring the liquid from a bottle. Opening and closing the bottle cap may be taught as a separate activity at other times. If the child has not yet learnt to open the bottle, the adult can unscrew the cap, so that the child has to only lift the cap. Alternately, start with a bottle with a flip style lid if the child can operate it comfortably.



-  Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.
-  Follow the child's individual pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually.

Things to Keep in Mind

-  Start with the child's favourite drink.
-  If the child holds the bottle with both hands, the adult could hold the glass or cup in place. Once the child is able to pour comfortably, teach the child to hold cup or glass with one hand and pour.
-  Start with a small amount of liquid (e.g. 2-3 tablespoons) in a small bottle with a narrow mouth that the child is able to hold independently. This will also minimize the chance of spillage. Gradually increase the amount of liquid in the bottle
-  Once the child is independently able to pour, practice the skill with a wide mouth bottle. Thereafter, practice pouring from a water jug, if relevant in the child's environment. Gradually increase the amount of water in the bottle and water jug.
-  Initially, some children may benefit from a visual indicator on the cup/glass to know when to stop pouring. Have a clear mark on the cup/glass to indicate adequate level. This could be a broad line using a permanent ink, paint or adhesive tape.



EATING NEATLY



SITTING AND EATING A MEAL

VERY OFTEN children with autism find it hard to sit and stay at one place to eat. Instead of an adult following around to feed the child, time is better invested to teach the child to sit and finish eating. This is a great skill to practice as it teaches the child to sit through any activity at home or in school.

Getting Started

- 🍽️ Start teaching the skill with child's most preferred food items.
- 🍽️ For a child who does not sit in one place but runs around while eating, ensure that the sitting environment is such that it is very hard for the child to move out of the chair. This also gives the adult additional time to ensure that the child continues to sit, even if s/he tries. For instance:









- ✓ Little children may sit on a high chair. If the child prefers, have a foot stool to comfortably rest feet on. Many children with autism are uncomfortable having their legs dangle mid-air.
- ✓ Use chairs with arm rests
- ✓ Push the chair closer to the table, so that the child has to make additional effort to try and get up. This will give the adult more time to help the child back in the chair.
- ✓ Identify spaces such as a corner, next to a cupboard, specific place at the table etc. that makes it easier for the adult to guide the child back in the chair.
- ✓ Have the child sit in the middle with adults on either side who are able to gently guide the child back to the chair before they run away.

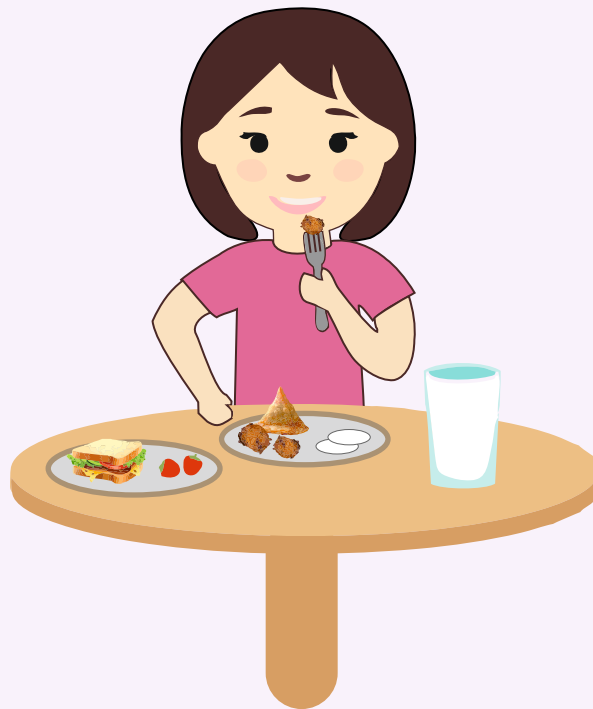
Suggested Words to Use

1. Sit
2. First finish, then go



Things to Keep in Mind

-  Start by teaching this skill with a highly preferred food item.
-  You may also use the child's favourite toy, activity, or music that they get only when sitting at the table to increase sitting duration.
-  If the child manages to run away from the table, the adult can gently bring the child back to the table and say, "First finish, then go" in a gentle and matter of fact voice. Avoid scolding or reproaching the child.
-  Respect the child's wishes to eat. Do not force feed the child.
-  Eating with the family at the specified place where the family sits for meals, at the dining table or on the floor, may enhance the chances of sitting through the meal.
-  Use a timer to give clarity to the child about the duration of sitting.
-  Practice sitting through table-top activities that the child really enjoys. These activities will further help the child sit for longer durations.
-  Alongside, help the child to indicate that s/he has finished eating or does not want to eat anymore.

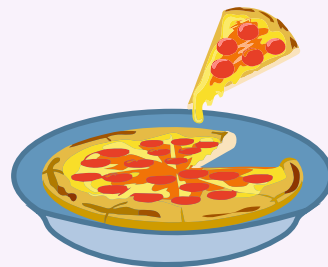


EATING ONE BITE AT A TIME

THE FOCUS of this activity is to teach the child to independently eat bite-sized pieces of dry food items such as Roti, Puri, Vada, Dosa, Pakodas, Fries, Cake, Sandwich etc. The idea is for the child to learn to pick up and neatly eat one piece at a time.

Getting Started

- 🍽️ Ensure everything you need is in place:
- 🍽️ Bowl / High edge plate
- 🍽️ Favourite food cut into bite-sized pieces.

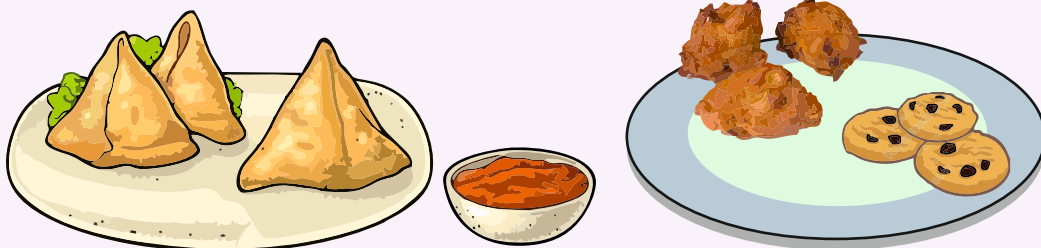


Suggested Words to Use



1. Take one
2. Eat

Things to Keep in Mind

- ☺ Start with the child's favourite food items.
- ☺ Some children will tend to pick up many pieces at a time or put too many pieces in the mouth at once. Start by keeping only one piece at a time in the plate. Add a piece to the plate only after the child finishes eating the first piece. Gradually increase the number of the pieces in the plate.
- ☺ Vary size and texture of food to encourage biting and chewing.
- ☺ Some children have tactile sensitivity and may or may not enjoy touching specific textures. For instance, some children dislike the touch of soft, wet items such as fruits but are comfortable about dry textures like chips or cookies. Be mindful of the child's sensory preferences.



EATING ONE BITE AT A TIME

-  Practice with food items that may be typically included in a child's tiffin box.
-  Using spoon, toothpick, fork, and knife may be taught alongside depending on the child's skills and family environment.




WIPING HANDS AND MOUTH

AN IMPORTANT SKILL necessary at mealtimes is to be able to know when to clean fingers or wipe mouth and then use a napkin to wipe fingers and mouth or in case of any spills. This is a necessary skill that helps the child eat neatly.

Getting Started

Ensure everything you need is in place:

 Favourite food

 Napkin / Tissue



Suggested Words to Use

1. Take napkin
2. Wipe fingers
3. Wipe mouth
4. Keep napkin



Teaching the Sequence






- Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.
- Follow the child's pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually. The level of support that a child requires may vary at each step. So, some children may begin to independently take napkin before wiping mouth or fingers independently. Some others however, may continue to need a reminder to use the napkin but may learn to wipe hands and mouth relatively faster.

Things to Keep in Mind

- Many children with autism have sensory concerns and may find it hard to perceive the 'sensation' of anything on fingers, or mouth

WIPING HANDS AND MOUTH

area. Therefore, they may not make an effort to wipe their hand or mouth clean. Consult an occupational therapist for suggestions on activities that can generate better awareness.

-  Talking to the child to let her / him know also helps generate better awareness of body.
-  This skill may also be taught as a routine step while eating and drinking.
-  When teaching the skill, have a designated and accessible place to place the napkin e.g. in the lap or on one side of the plate.
-  If using a tissue, gradually introduce the understanding of when the tissue is ready to be discarded and when to use a fresh tissue.
-  If the child tries to wipe fingers or mouth with anything other than designated napkin / tissue (e.g. wipe mouth with back of hand or wipe fingers on clothes) gently guide using the designated napkin or tissue before the child is able to wipe with anything else.




USING CUTLERY



EATING WITH A SPOON

THIS ACTIVITY focuses on teaching a child to eat independently and neatly, using a spoon.

Getting Started

 Ensure everything you need is in place

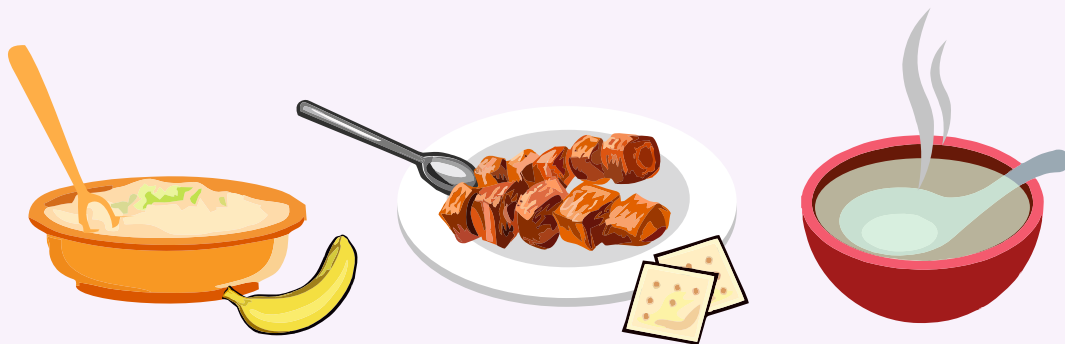
- ✓ Spoon
- ✓ Bowl or high edge plate
- ✓ Favourite food



Suggested Sequence to Teach

The following sequence may be individualized to child's skill set and family environment



- 🍲 Semi-dry food (e.g. mashed banana, Dalia / Oatmeal, Upma, Halwa)
- 🍲 Dry food (such as snack namkeens / mixtures)
- 🍲 Liquids (such as Dal, Rasam or soups)
- 🍲 Use spoon as a knife to make bite-size portions (such as Paneer, vegetables, Koftas or Kebabs)









Suggested Words to Use

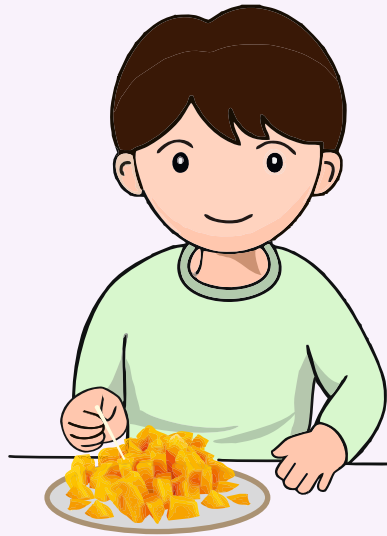
1. Hold (plate / bowl)
2. Take food in spoon
3. Eat

Teaching the Sequence

-  Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.
-  Follow the child's individual pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually.

Things to Keep in Mind

-  Practice scooping with a spoon during play in the sand pit or in pretend play activities such as cooking, feeding a doll or a soft toy.
-  Starting with food items that stick to a spoon such as mashed banana, Dalia or Oatmeal, thick curd etc. facilitate success.
-  Practice eating heavy dry food (e.g. Poha, Upma) as well as lighter dry snacks (e.g. namkeens) with a spoon.
-  When teaching to eat liquids such as Dal, Rasam, soup etc. start with a child spoon or a soup spoon (with a high rim) that is easier to hold and minimizes spillage.
-  If the child uses their other hand to guide food to mouth, gently guide his/her hand to pile up the food on the spoon instead.
-  Stay comfortable and support the child to wipe themselves clean in case of spills.



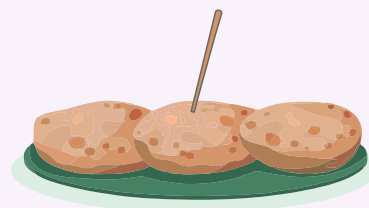
EATING WITH A TOOTHPICK

EATING WITH a toothpick may not be something that a child does at home on an everyday basis and may be limited to occasionally eating snacks (e.g. alu chaat or fruit chaat) when the family goes out to eat, at weddings or other social events. Although, there may not be an urgency to teach this, it adds to a child's repertoire of skill sets and allows a child to eat independently in different social settings.

Getting Started

🍽️ Ensure everything you need is in place



- ✓ Toothpick
- ✓ Bowl or plate
- ✓ Favourite food







Suggested Words to Use

1. Take toothpick
2. Pick food
3. Eat



Teaching the Sequence

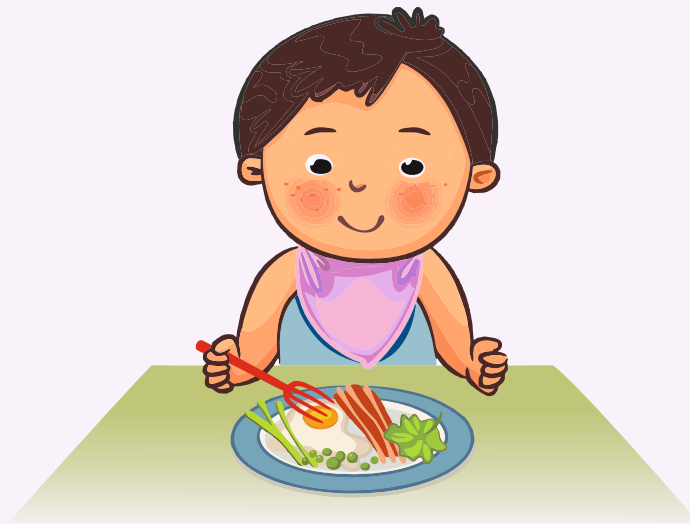
-  Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.
-  Follow the child's individual pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually.

Things to Keep in Mind

-  Start with items that are easier to pierce with a toothpick such as boiled potatoes, stewed apple or pear, vada etc., but not so soft that they disintegrate e.g. overripe papaya, or banana.
-  Practice with a variety of sizes and textures.
-  In the beginning, have a bowl or a plate with a higher edge to minimize spills and facilitate success.
-  If the child tries to put food in mouth with the other hand, gently guide his/her hand to put food on toothpick instead.

EATING WITH A TOOTHPICK


-  Eating with a toothpick requires a different grip and hand pressure than when eating with a fork and some children may find it harder. Teaching this skill may be of low priority if not very relevant in a child's everyday life.
-  Some children may require additional support when eating from disposable bowls/plates to avoid piercing through the container.



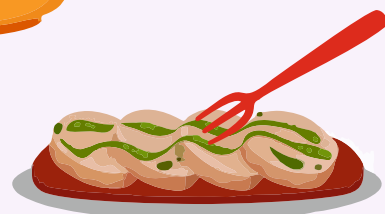
EATING WITH A FORK

IN ADDITION to eating with a spoon, some families regularly use forks at mealtimes. Eating independently with a fork may be an important skill to focus on if relevant in a child's daily life and family environment. This activity focuses on teaching a child to eat neatly and independently using a fork.

Getting Started

 Ensure everything you need is in place

- ✓ Fork
- ✓ Bowl or high edge plate
- ✓ Favourite food



Suggested Words to Use

1. Take fork
2. Pick food
3. Eat





Teaching the Sequence

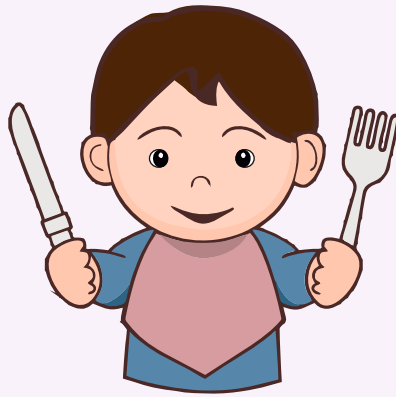
- 🍽️ Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.
- 🍽️ Follow the child's individual pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually.

Things to Keep in Mind

- 🍽️ Start with items that are easier to pierce with a fork such as boiled potatoes, stewed apples or pears, Vada etc. Make sure the food is not so soft that they disintegrate like overripe papaya, or banana etc.
- 🍽️ Practice with a variety of sizes and textures.
- 🍽️ Use a gripper for the fork if required to ensure a better grip.
- 🍽️ Start with eating in a bowl or a plate with a higher edge to minimize spills and facilitate success.

EATING WITH A FORK


-  You can also teach the child to use the fork as a knife to make bite-size portions when eating foods such as Paneer, vegetables, Koftas or Kebabs.
-  If relevant in the child's environment, practice eating different food items like rice when fork prongs face upwards, or noodles or pasta when food needs to be wrapped around the fork.



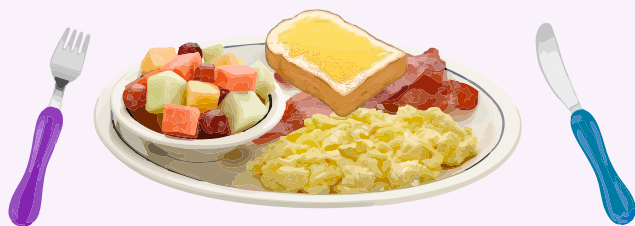
EATING WITH A KNIFE AND FORK

THIS IS A COMPLEX SKILL that requires simultaneous use of both hands. Using both knife and fork may not necessarily be relevant to everyday mealtimes in many families. Introduce the skill when the child is able to independently and neatly eat using a spoon and a fork, can make bite size portions using a spoon and has the necessary motor skills to use both hands simultaneously.

Getting Started

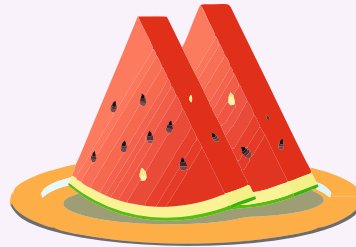
 Ensure everything you need is in place

- ✓ Fork
- ✓ Knife
- ✓ Plate
- ✓ Favourite food



Suggested Words to Use

1. Take knife (in dominant hand)
2. Take fork (in non-dominant hand)
3. Hold food with fork
4. Cut with knife






Teaching the Sequence

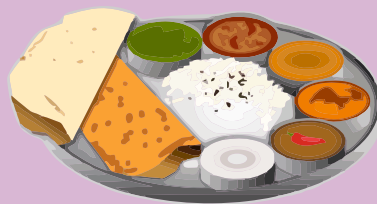
- 🍽️ Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.
- 🍽️ Follow the child's individual pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually.

Things to Keep in Mind

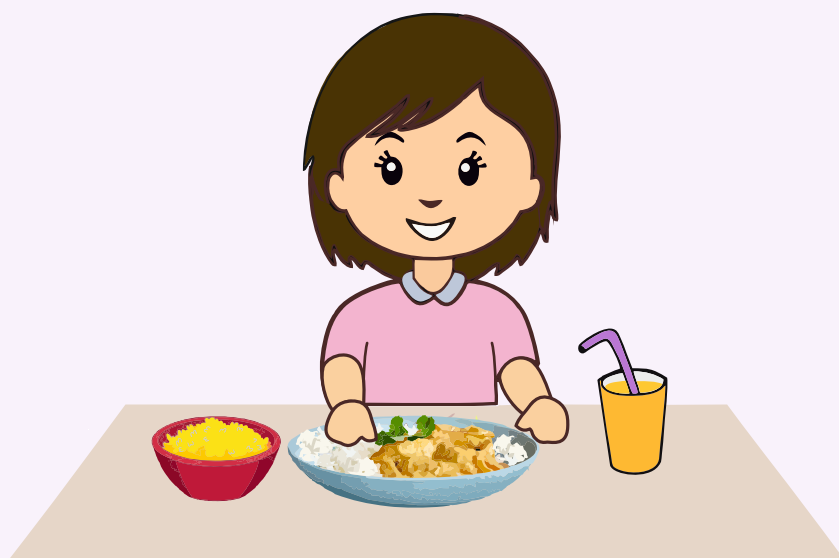
- 🍽️ Be mindful of child's (not adult's) hand dominance.
- 🍽️ Introduce using fork and knife with items that are easier to cut into e.g. apple, pear, Vada etc. but not so soft that they disintegrate (e.g. very soft papaya, banana etc.).
- 🍽️ Practice using knife and fork on foods with different textures.

EATING WITH A KNIFE AND FORK

-  If the child enjoys playing with playdough, practice using the knife to cut playdough.
-  Once the skill is learnt, generalize the use of knife to other activities. For instance, to butter toast or pile food like Dal Chawal or scrambled eggs / Paneer on the fork.
-  Teaching this skill may be of low priority if not very relevant in a child's everyday life.



EATING MEALS



EATING A RICE-LIKE MEAL

INDIAN CUISINE often requires mixing dry and wet food such as curd, curry, vegetable, Paneer, meat, chutney etc. in rice, Upma, Poha and other such items using fingers, a spoon, or a fork. The skill may be introduced, once a child eats comfortably with fingers or by using cutlery.

Getting Started

🍽️ Ensure everything you need is in place

- ✓ Bowl or high edge plate
- ✓ Favourite food
- ✓ Spoon and/or fork

Suggested Words to Use

By Hand

1. Put Dal (or wet item)
2. Put vegetable (or any other accompaniment)
3. Mix
4. Scoop



Using a Spoon or Fork

1. Take spoon, fork, or both
2. Put Dal (or wet item)
3. Put vegetable (or any other accompaniment if applicable)
4. Mix









Teaching the Sequence

- 🍽️ Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.
- 🍽️ Follow the child's individual pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually. The level of support that a child requires may vary at each step across the

different ways to eat a meal i.e. by hand, using spoon or a fork as well as across food items. So, a child may learn to mix Dal relatively faster than to mix vegetables. Similarly, some may learn to use cutlery faster whereas some others may spend relatively lesser time to learn to eat by hand.

Things to Keep in Mind


-  Start with liquid food items such as Dal or Rasam that require less effort to mix before moving to dishes with relatively thick gravies.
-  Start with mixing smaller quantities (a couple of spoonsful at a time) of any one wet item only. Gradually increase quantity and number of items.
-  When teaching to mix, have bite-sized portions (e.g. in vegetables, Paneer, meats etc.) so the child can concentrate only on mixing.
-  Some children find it easier to mix with a fork rather than a spoon.
-  Eating in an edged plate can facilitate scooping and minimize spills.
-  Some children with autism find it difficult to scoop food such as rice with hand. This may be because of fine motor coordination and/or tactile sensitivity due to which they do not enjoy touch of wet, soft textures such as vegetable or curries. To facilitate independence, encourage the child to eat using a spoon or a fork instead of hand.



EATING A ROTI-LIKE MEAL

THE FOCUS of this activity is to teach the child to independently eat food items such as Chapattis, Puri, Dosa, Idli, Vada, Thepla etc. along with vegetables, curries, and any other accompaniment. The skill may be introduced once a child is comfortable to eat finger foods.

Getting Started

 Ensure everything you need is in place

✓ Bowl or high edge plate


✓ Favourite food

✓ Spoon



Suggested Sequence to Teach

The following sequence may be individualized to child's skill set and family environment

 Tear dry food (e.g. Chapatti)

- 🍲 Tear dry food and dip in wet food (e.g. Dal)
- 🍲 Tear dry food and scoop dry food (e.g. vegetable)
- 🍲 Tear, scoop dry food item and dip in wet food item

Suggested Words to Use

1. Hold (with both hands)
2. Tear
3. Take vegetable / dip in Dal (as applicable)







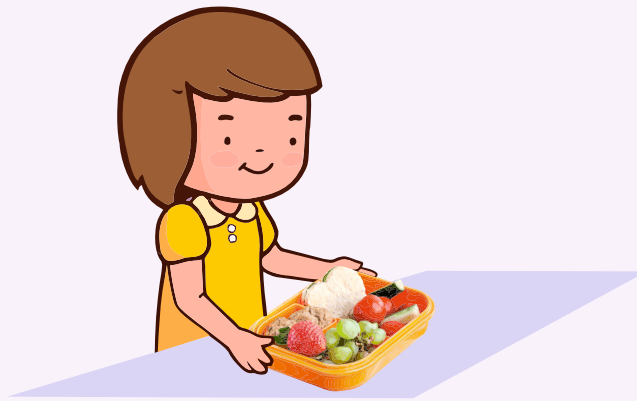
Teaching the Sequence

- 🍲 Gradually build the skill to tear items such as a Chapatti, Thepla, Puri, Dosa, Parantha etc. The following sequence may be used.
 - ✓ Tear the food item $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the way for each bite so that the child has to make little effort to tear the rest of it.
 - ✓ Tear the food item $\frac{1}{2}$ of the way for each bite so that the child has to tear the rest of it.
 - ✓ Tear the food item $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the way for each bite so that the child has to tear the rest of it.
- 🍲 Follow the child's individual pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually. The level of

support that a child requires may vary at each step and across different food items. The child may become independent in some steps sooner than the others. For instance, some children may need minimal support to tear a Roti, more support and time to tear a Parantha, and relatively more time to learn to scoop vegetables.

Things to Keep in Mind

-  Start with food items that are easier to tear (such as homemade Chapatti, Thepla, Dosa etc.) before moving to other items that require more effort (such as Parathas, Naans etc.).
-  Some children may find it easier to start with dipping dry food (e.g. Chapatti) in wet food item (such as a Dal) before moving on to scooping wet food (such as scooping Channa with Chapatti).
-  Some children with autism find it difficult to eat by hand. This may be because of fine motor concerns and/or tactile sensitivity (may not enjoy touch of wet, soft textures such as vegetable or curries). Be inventive in identifying aspects of independent eating while working on such concerns. For instance, child could first eat the dry item with hand (e.g. tear and eat dry Chapatti) and then eat curries or vegetable with a spoon/fork. Children who struggle to tear (e.g. Chapatti), may learn to take a bite from a roll (e.g. Chapatti rolled) while eating curries or vegetable with spoon/fork.
-  Build the meal to include a range of items with different textures and flavours.

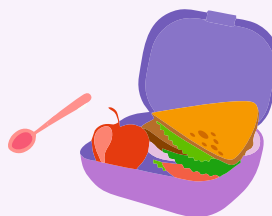


EATING FROM A TIFFIN BOX

IT IS IMPORTANT for children to practice eating out of a tiffin box or a snack box. This is equally relevant in creches, day cares and school settings as well as in social situations so the child can independently have a snack without adult supervision.

Suggested Words to Use

1. Take out tiffin box (from the bag)
2. Open tiffin box
3. Eat food
4. Put back spoon / fork (if applicable)
5. Close tiffin box
6. Put back tiffin box (in the bag)



Teaching the Sequence

- Focus only on one skill. When teaching the child to eat from a tiffin box, the adult may open and close the lid of the tiffin box, if the child struggles with it. Teach opening and closing the lid as a separate activity.



- Using the suggested words, teach the skill using backward chaining as described in the *Overview*.



- Follow the child's individual pace. Start with providing as much support as the child requires and reduce it gradually.

Things to Keep in Mind

- Teach opening and closing a tiffin box as a separate activity with a small quantity of child's favourite item in the tiffin box. This will keep the child interested and motivated.



EATING FROM A TIFFIN BOX

- Start with a tiffin box that will be easy for the child to open and close. Practice with different styles of clasp and lids such as some have lids that need to be taken off, others with attached lids etc.



- Include child's favourite dry finger food items, cut into bite-sized portions that are easy for the child to eat independently.








- Avoid food items that can spill or leak (such as Dal) initially.
- If including spoon / fork in the tiffin box, have a visually clear spot to put them back in and practice all the steps accordingly.





NEXT STEPS

NEXT STEPS

ONCE THE CHILD is independent, there are additional things you will want the child to learn. The goals may be prioritised depending on the child's age, skills, strengths, and the family environment.

-  Set the place at meal times. Or in helping to keep plates, glasses, spoons, etc. ready.
-  Sit and wait to be served.
-  Serve self at meal times. Start with finger foods that are dry and easy (e.g. snacks, salad, Papad, Chappati), then dry food with serving spoon (e.g. rice, dry vegetables and snacks) and then liquid food with serving spoon (e.g. Dals and curries).
-  Ask for more food, when they finish the portion in the plate or bowl.
-  After finishing their own food, they must wait for others to finish eating.

-  Organise simple snacks (e.g. Take out snack from wrapper or box and put it on a plate. Take out the juice box from the fridge and drink).
-  Clean up after a snack or a meal. For instance, keep used plate in the kitchen, throw used tissues, leftover food, wrappers, and/or tissues in the dustbin, keep snack box in the designated spot.

Notes

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Notes

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AFA's Vision is a society that views the interdependence of people of every ability as valuable and enriching and seeks to provide equal opportunities to all