

What about those “picky eaters”?

It is natural for children to be cautious with new foods. We know that for young children, it can take 10 to 15 times of actually putting the food in their mouth before they will come to like it. We also know that some children are especially cautious about trying new foods, while others use food as a way to be in control.

Use these strategies to create a positive environment and minimize the struggles for trying new foods.

For infants

- Don't be discouraged by the frown. Infants naturally prefer salty and sweet tastes, so some fruits and vegetables may take 10 to 15 tries for a child to accept the new food. Don't give up.
- When offering a new food, serve the infant with a food they are familiar with and like. You could try alternating bites between the new food and the familiar food.

For toddlers and older children

- Create a routine that everyone should try and taste new foods offered at your center. It's the rule at your table. However, do not force them to finish it all.
- Put a very small portion on the plate to try (like two peas). Young children are most afraid that they won't like the new food, so help them by putting a small amount on their plate—it looks less scary.
- Always offer healthy foods or create a policy for parents to provide healthy foods in lunches and snacks—especially ensuring that parents provide plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid rewarding good behavior or a clean plate with foods of any kind. There are other options for good behavior like stickers, hugs, praises, extra time to play, etc. Especially avoid forcing a child to finish the “healthy foods” to get to their dessert or sweets—this can make the healthy food seem like punishment and force the child to eat when they are full.
- Offer dessert once in a while so children do not expect them at every meal. When a child comes to expect dessert, they may not eat the healthier food or they may see it as a reward for that healthy food. By not having dessert as a regular option, you minimize this struggle.
- When introducing a new food, make it a game or lesson. Again, it can take up to 10 to 15 tries for a child to accept a new food.
 - Offer the new food outside the meal time. You can make it a classroom lesson and then have only one child try the food. The rest of the children can try the new food later. This creates a desirability to try the new food.
 - While sitting with the children at the meal, you can also create crunching contests to see who can crunch or smush their new food.

