

DEVELOPMENTAL PRINCIPLES GUIDING FEEDING PRACTICES

At all ages, developmentally appropriate feeding depends on a division of responsibility. The child must be allowed and encouraged to determine what and how much to eat from what the parent provides.

Child's age, developmental tasks	Parents' jobs in optimum feeding
<p>Newborn 0-3 months Homeostasis Remain calm and alert Begin to be interested Filter stimuli Regulate sleep states Begin to explore: Sight, touch, taste, smell</p>	<p>Core tasks: Observe and understand the infant. Respond to infant cues. Understand and respect sleep rhythms Learn to read and respond to baby's cues Time care and feeding for quiet alert state Understand baby's own temperament Be willing and able to feed on demand</p>
<p>Infant 2-6 months Attachment Learn to love Coordinate reflexes Move and communicate deliberately</p>	<p>Core task: Develop and maintain emotional give and take. Help baby be calm and alert during feeding Feed baby when she wants to eat Talk and smile; talk and smile back Understand baby's signs and do what baby wants</p>
<p>Older baby 5-9 months Attachment/separation individuation Consolidating attachment Beginning to experience self as separate Begins taking an interest in what lies beyond the parent</p>	<p>Core task: Understand and support the child's interest in things Understand baby's development: eating skills and body control Start solids based on what baby can <i>do</i>, not how old she is Feed the way baby wants to eat: fast or slow, little or much, brave or cautious Give baby many chances to like new food Have family meals the child is working toward joining</p>
<p>Almost-toddler 7-15 months Separation individuation Begins to experience self as separate Cares deeply about doing it him- or herself</p>	<p>Core task: Recognize and support the child's need to do it herself. Include the child at family meals Choose "safe" food to pick up, chew and swallow Give many chances to experiment with new food and learn to like it Time snacks so child can be hungry but not too hungry at mealtime Give attention but not <i>all</i> the attention</p>
<p>Toddler 11-36 months Separation individuation Develops perception of self as "separate" Grapples with balancing connection & autonomy Develops concept of control Somatopsychological differentiation (distinguishing feelings from sensations) Organizes behavior into sequences</p>	<p>Core task: Teach child he or she is part of the family Have family meals; scheduled snacks Not let the child graze Eat with the child Teach the child to behave at mealtimes Not short order cook Let the child experiment, eat much or little</p>
<p>Preschooler 3-5 years Initiative Learning and doing Working toward mastery Symbolic thought: "figures out" Imitates and tries to please</p>	<p>Core task: Provide both structure and trust Make choices about parenting Provide mastery opportunities Maintain structure of meals and snacks Don't force, reward or shame Parents eat with child; don't just feed Make mealtimes pleasant</p>