

Family Meals Focus

The Ellyn Satter Institute Newsletter

sDOR.2-6y validation transforms nutrition intervention

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Nutritionists, health, and mental health professionals have long depended on the Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding (sDOR) as a practical and common-sense way to help parents be successful with feeding and raise children who eat well.¹⁻⁴ Although experience has shown that sDOR works, it is only we now have a questionnaire, sDOR.2-6y™, that can *prove* that it works. After a decade of rigorous testing, the last link in the chain of evidence gives parents and professionals an achievable way to address their biggest feeding worry: that children are doing well nutritionally.⁵

Following sDOR is associated with lower child nutritional risk

As indicated by coded video observation, parents who score high on sDOR.2-6y actually *do* feed in a way that is consistent with sDOR: They do the *what*, *when*, and *where* of *feeding* and let their child do the *how much* and *whether* of *eating*.⁶ They also use less restriction and pressure to eat.⁵ Moreover, and this is the *really* big news, parents who score high on sDOR.2-6y have children who show lower nutritional risk.^{5,7} That means parents can do their feeding jobs and relax, even when children show typically maddening eating behaviors like eating a lot one day and hardly anything the next, eating fruits and vegetables one time and shunning them another, and taking weeks, months, and even *years* to investigate new food.

Relaxing about children's eating means a *lot!* Validation results support what parents say: When feeding goes well, they and their children feel better all day. Parents who feed well—who score high on sDOR.2-6y—report better quality of life indicators that go beyond mealtime. Their stress level is lower, their sleep quality is better, and they are less likely to show uncontrolled or emotional eating. Those who have meals about the same times every day indicate a lower incidence of mood and anxiety disorders.⁵ They see their children as doing better overall,^{5,7} and they are more likely to describe their children as “good eaters.”⁸

ecSatter is the path to nutritional excellence

sDOR.2-6y validation results put a whole new spin on supporting children nutritionally. Validation work combined with earlier evidence relative to the Satter Eating Competence Model (ecSatter) suggests that children's nutritional well-being can be secured through parents' Eating Competence. Adults who are Eating Competent (EC), who score high on the validated Satter Eating Competence Inventory (ecSI 2.0), have more nutritious, higher-quality diets,^{9,10} show numerous positive health indicators,^{9,11,12} and do better with respect to food management.^{13,14} EC parents score high on sDOR.2-6y. Children of parents who score high on ecSI 2.0 have lower nutritional risk.^{5,7}

The implications? Instead of telling parents what and/or how much to eat and feed their child, teach parents to follow sDOR and support their Eating Competence. Trust the process. Parents who feel secure and comfortable with getting enough to eat can be trusted to learn and grow in their ability to manage food and achieve dietary variety.¹⁵ And they are able to trust their children to eat well.



EC-consistent questions support parent leadership with feeding

- How do you see to it that you get fed? How do you go about feeding your family? What would you like to be different?
- Find out about structure: Do they have regular meals and snacks?
- What they eat will emerge, but don't stop at that. Find out how they *feel* about what they eat and feed their family. Are they ashamed of their food?

EC-consistent interventions support parents' trust in children's autonomy with eating

- Give parents strong permission to eat what they eat. Reassure them of their food's nutritional value.
- Encourage them to be faithful about feeding themselves and their family. Discuss organizing the food they currently eat into regular meals and sit-down snacks.
- Give practical suggestions that support internal regulation: Wait to eat at regular meals and snacks. Go to meals hungry and eat until satisfied. Do it again the next time, and the next.

Support children's autonomy with eating

In the next issue of Family Meals Focus we will discuss doing parent education and conducting clinical practice in ways that are compatible with giving children autonomy with their eating. Here is a sneak peek at common interfering practices:

- Insisting family meals be "healthy."
- Trying to get children to eat certain foods.
- Trying to get children to eat less.
- Identifying children as being incapable with eating and growth.

New directions in research

The validation research is only the beginning. Consider the research questions that can now be answered:

- Is parents' ecSI 2.0 and sDOR.2-6y associated with child growth patterns and other physiological parameters?
- Is parents' ecSI 2.0 and sDOR.2-6y associated with their executive functioning skills related to organization and strategic planning?
- How would these questions be answered for families with children who have serious medical conditions?

For references and resources, go to

<https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/family-meals-focus-no-109-sdor-2-6ytm-validation-transforms-nutrition-intervention/>