

## Troubleshooting with the Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding

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While it seems simple, following the Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding (sDOR) takes steady nerves and a leap of faith. It also takes *time*. sDOR guides parents in taking leadership with feeding and giving children autonomy with eating without imposing food rules on either parents or children. Parents' making the transition to the meal habit from irregular, unstructured meals and snacks can take *months*.

After that, children's eating extremes need weeks or months to moderate. Children need to be sure they won't be pressured to join in, eat, or behave in certain ways. After that, they can rediscover their internal regulators.

*The Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding (sDOR) only works when all the parts are in place, with nothing added or taken away.*

Making the transition to sDOR is rarely glitch-free. The child's negative eating behaviors give signs that sDOR isn't being properly applied, is therefore not "working," and what to do about it.

### Troubleshoot with sDOR

- *The child eats as much as they can, whenever they can.* Consider restriction and/or unreliable feeding times. Also, does the child need an unusually large amount of food and parents have difficulty accepting that?
- *The child is uninterested in meals, resists attending, or conversely child prolongs mealtimes.* Look for mealtime pressure, direct or indirect restriction, and/or food handouts that spoil the child's appetite. Also consider whether the child only gets parents' attention at mealtime.
- *The child resists coming to or staying at meals.* Look for mealtime pressure and for the expectation that the child stay at mealtime as long as adults do. Neuroatypical children take an especially long time to recover from pressure, restriction, and/or unpleasant mealtimes.
- *The child is not regaining their interest in eating what parents eat.* Look for an unrealistic time frame (recovering from pressure and becoming willing to eat unfamiliar food can take years), pressure, unappealing (e.g. low-fat, unseasoned) food.
- *The child sneaks and hides food.* look for restriction, mealtime pressure, food-portioning, unappealing food, strict avoidance of "forbidden food."
- *The child frequently or even continually says "I'm hungry," talks about, asks for food.* Look for unreliable meal/snack times, food restriction, feeding for emotional reasons. Consider whether the child's natural enthusiasm for food and eating has spooked parents into restricting.



## Getting structure in place takes time—and permission

From the perspective of the Satter Feeding Dynamics Model (fdSatter), family meals and sit-down snacks are most importantly about *structure* and *warm togetherness*, not about the food. It can take months for parents to get structure in place, and the child's eating won't improve until it is. Help parents get the meal habit by neutralizing the attitude, “We don't sit down and eat together if it's fast food, like we would if it was home cooked.” Instead, encourage parents to eat what they typically eat, just organize it into meals and snacks. Administer this antidote to good-food-bad-food attitudes:

*Not all meals are perfect; eat together anyway.*

## Learning to be considerate without catering takes time

Parents cater when they limit menus to foods children readily accept, make special food just for them, or let them eat and drink on the run. Parents are considerate when they remember that children are inexperienced eaters who want to be successful with family meals. Considerate parents plan meals with a variety of food, include fat in cooking and serving, include one or two foods the child enjoys eating, regularly expose children to unfamiliar foods the parents enjoy eating, and include high-fat, high-sugar foods (AKA junk food) often enough for the “treat” aspect to wear off.

## Parents need time to stop pressuring and restricting

Children's negative eating attitudes and behaviors offer clues to poor feeding practices. Parents may have to video feeding times to become aware that they are pressuring or being restrictive. They might dish up the child's food, scoop and rearrange it, make a child finish one food before being allowed to have another, “forget” to offer a child certain foods, run out of favorite foods, give selective attention for eating (praise or give attention for eating, ignore for not-eating, or vice versa) ignore all but the child's misbehavior, give the child the hairy eyeball for taking a second or third helping, or look worried when the child doesn't eat much or eats a lot.

## Children need time to adjust

After parents get structure in place and stop pressuring and restricting, children need time to adjust. If parents have been restrictive or put a lot of pressure on the child to eat or behave in certain ways, children's eating will become more extreme before it moderates. Extreme eating allows children to test the rules and instinctively recover their sensations of hunger and fullness. Most importantly of all, children need time to trust that their parents really *will* feed them regularly and let them eat as much or as little as they want of food parents provide. Children need time, in short, to become competent with eating: To be relaxed and comfortable with family meals and snacks and to eat as much as they want of food they enjoy.

## The take-home message

Do problem solving with sDOR if a child continues to be negative, upset, and anxious about eating. Either structure is eroding or pressure and/or restriction, in all its sneaky, devious, insidious ways, is creeping in. *Ellyn Satter's Feeding with Love and Good Sense VISION workshop* teaches you to detect errors with feeding dynamics and work with parents on correcting them.

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### ***Feeding with Love and Good Sense***

To understand how to be faithful about doing your jobs with feeding and scrupulous about letting your child do her jobs with eating, read Ellyn Satter's *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*.

To see what good feeding looks like as well as to read about it, see Ellyn Satter's *Feeding with Love and Good Sense DVD II*. For the home use version, [click here](#).

