

# 10 Strategies to Tackle Your Toddler's PICKY EATING



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# PICKY EATING IS REAL ... *but it can change.*

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Although you see and hear the term everywhere, I don't love referring to kids as "picky eaters" because it can often be used as an excuse and gets internalized by our kids as a permanent state of being. But here's the thing ... it isn't! "Picky eating" is a behavior - and like any other behavior (good or bad) it *can* be changed.

But knowing that picky eating can be changed, doesn't necessarily make having a picky eater at home any easier. Having tools you can turn to helps make navigating this phase, and supporting your kids through it, that much more easy.

## PICKY EATING COULD BE CONNECTED TO

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Early issues around feeding or mealtime.



Waiting too long to introduce a variety of textures, especially lumpy foods.



Pressuring your child to eat before they are ready or foods that they are not yet comfortable with.



Modeling parents' own fussy or controlling food behaviors.

Understanding the roots of your child's choosiness is step one, and may take a while to fully figure out (and, if I'm being really honest, you might never *fully* understand). Regardless, using some (or all) of the tools & techniques on the following pages can help you help your little one develop a happy, healthy life-long relationship with food.

Happy feeding,







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PICKY EATING TOOL CHEST

# CHEAT SHEET

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# 1

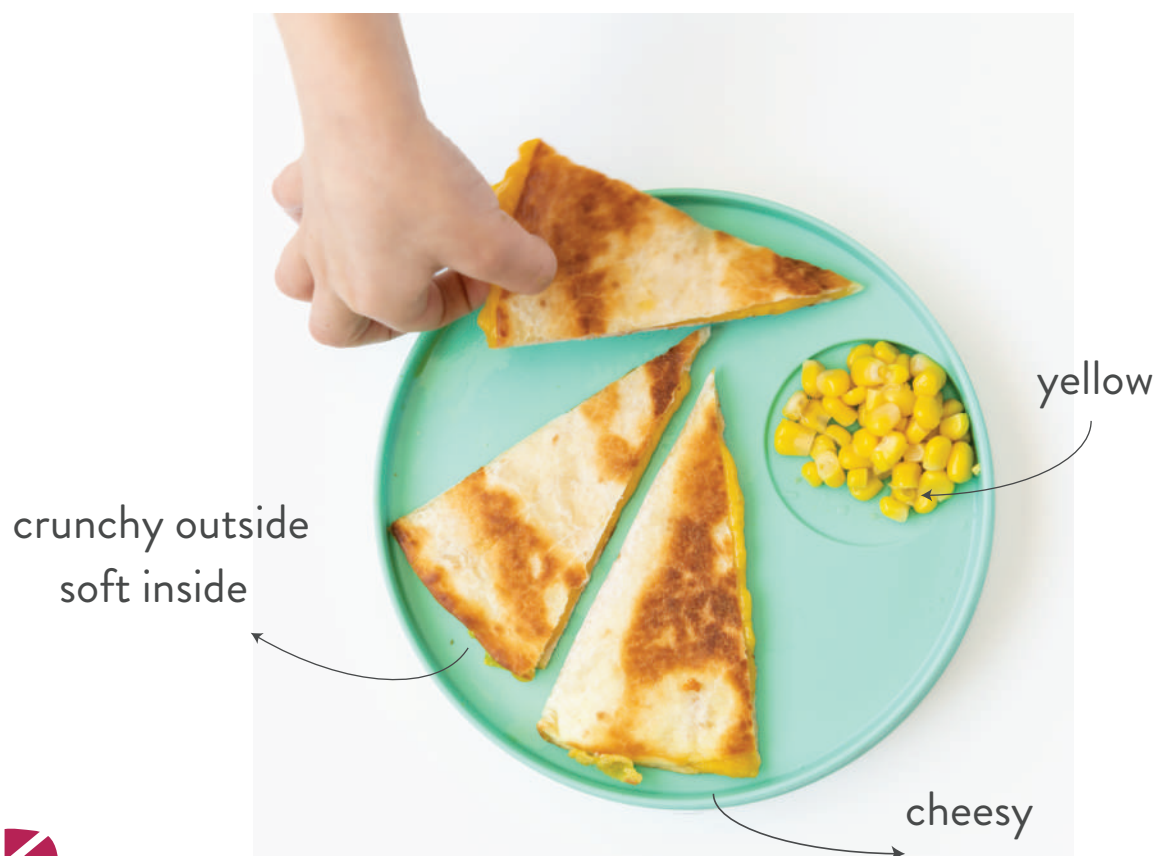
## NAME IT

Give your kids language they can use to describe the foods they are tasting - including those that they love and those they are learning to love. Setting expectations about what they can expect in terms of textures and flavors can help them draw connections and build confidence.

### WHY THIS HELPS

Imagine I handed you something unfamiliar and said “Here, taste this! It’s good for you.” Would you eat it? I probably wouldn’t either. Imagine instead I said “Here, try this! It’s a little salty, and very crunchy, and it tastes like a red pepper.” Suddenly this new thing isn’t so scary.

Helping your kids name the texture, flavor, and smells of the foods they eat means you help prime them for their new food experiences. Plus, instead of just “I don’t like this,” they can be a little more clear with you what what it is, precisely, that they don’t like (“It’s too mushy”).



# 2

## START SMALL

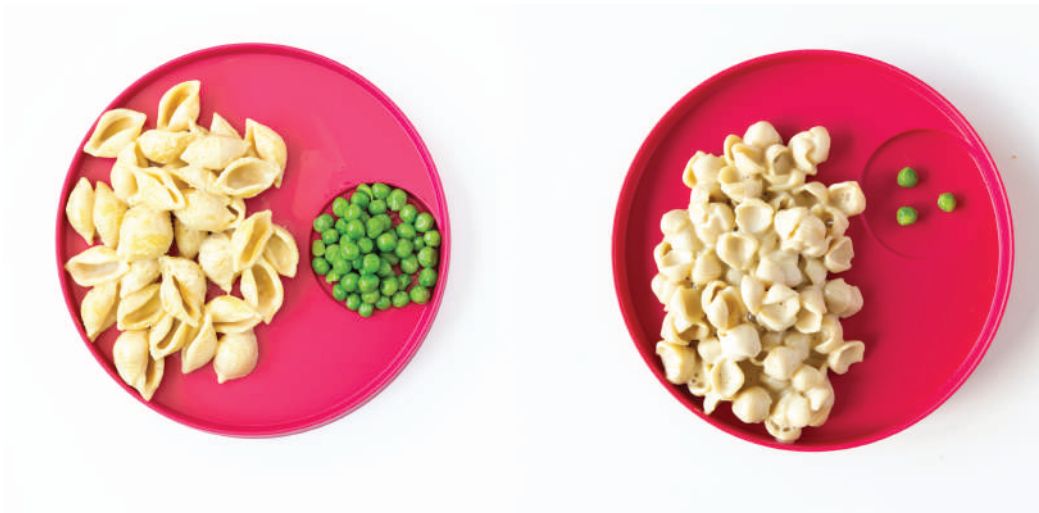
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Most of the time we make the mistake of preparing a whole meal with a new food which inevitably leads to refusal from our picky eaters: "That's broccoli. I don't like broccoli. It touched my pasta, so I can't eat my pasta. Instead of pasta with broccoli and sausage - all mixed into a delicious jumble - start by serving a small floret of broccoli alongside their favorite pasta.

### WHY THIS HELPS

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When you start with small portions, you take away the pressure your kids feel to eat a huge pile of an unfamiliar food. Instead you've just given them permission to explore with all their senses. And the next time peas are put in front of them they will be less likely to immediately reject them.



The meal on the left is scary when you don't like peas and children are likely to reject the entire meal. The meal on the right takes away pressure to eat the peas, and instead gives your kids permission to explore them with all their senses.



# 3

## GIVE IT A SPECIAL SPACE

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Whether you use a separate "no thank you" bowl or a tasting plate or dishes that are specifically designed with a space for the foods that your kids are still learning to like, like our Nudge Plate, putting new foods in a special place takes away their (scary) power.

### WHY THIS HELPS

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Signaling to your kids which foods are there for practice will help them feel safer tasting something new. And, for those kids who don't like those unknown foods to get anywhere near their favorite dishes, our Nudge plate (or a separate tasting plate) will help prevent rejection of the whole meal.





## SET A GOOD EXAMPLE

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I don't like mushrooms. I will eat them. I even prepare them sometimes. (Ok, fine ... rarely. I rarely prepare them.) As a result, my kids are not exposed to them and guess what ... they also don't like mushrooms.

### WHY THIS HELPS

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Extensive research shows that the most effective way to encourage your kids to have healthier eating habits is to let them see YOU having them. So, if you want your kids to practice tasting new foods here's a simple idea: do it together. Serving foods you don't like, and then being willing to taste them, will go a long way toward encouraging the same behavior in your kids.

{check it out}







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# 5

## INVOLVE YOUR KIDS IN DINNER PREP

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Finding ways to bring your kids into the kitchen when the pressure is low can often do wonders for their interest and willingness to try new foods. But, as always, be patient. Even older kids can be reluctant tasters, so this - like everything in parenting - will take patience and persistence!

### WHY THIS HELPS

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Kids who spend time around food - buying it, cleaning it, preparing it - are actually will to taste new foods (or to “accidentally” taste it while preparing it! Research shows that kids who spend time in the kitchen are also more likely to eat a variety of foods and to have healthier eating habits as they grow up.



# 6

## PRACTICE THE DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Created by child feeding expert Ellyn Satter, the division of responsibility states that grown-ups are in charge of deciding *what* food is offered, and *where* and *when* it's offered — and children are in charge of deciding *how much* (of the foods offered) they will eat.

### WHY THIS HELPS

First, continuing to offer foods that your picky eater has already declined (maybe time and again) provides multiple food exposures. Kids don't have to eat a food in order to benefit from it. Over time, your child's familiarity with the food will grow and with this comfort comes increased willingness to touch, smell, lick, bite, and even eat the food.

Secondly, you establish and demonstrate trust in your child and their ability to listen to their hunger cues and you empower them to listen to those cues. Kids who can still listen to their internal hunger cues are less likely to overeat.



# 7

## PAY ATTENTION TO TEXTURE & COLOR

Rather than just focusing on the specific foods your kids don't eat, focusing on the texture, broad flavor profile (salty, sweet, etc), and colors of the foods that your child does like to eat can help you find patterns and align those qualities with the ones he doesn't like.

### WHY THIS HELPS

Many children prefer raw veggies to cooked one, so try introducing a small raw broccoli Florette instead of steamed or frozen peas instead of cooked. These small changes will build your child's confidence in tasting foods and often lead to a happier, more enthusiastic eater.



Move your child from Pretzel ... to  
veggie puff ... to carrot



# 8

## MAKE ONLY ONE MEAL

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Making a separate meal for your child after she rejects the one you made might actually promote picky eating. This doesn't mean that you have to offer foods that are filled with items from their "NO WAY, I'M NOT EATING THAT!" list, but it is okay for you to tell your kids that there isn't another meal and they can choose from what is available.

### WHY THIS HELPS

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In addition to giving them confidence that they won't go hungry (which incidentally helps them build trust in you), making just one meal *WILL* make it more likely that your children will eventually try something new.

Lastly, it's a good idea to encourage your child to stay at the table for the designated mealtime — even if she doesn't eat. This signals to her that she's still welcome at the table and a member of the family.



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# 9

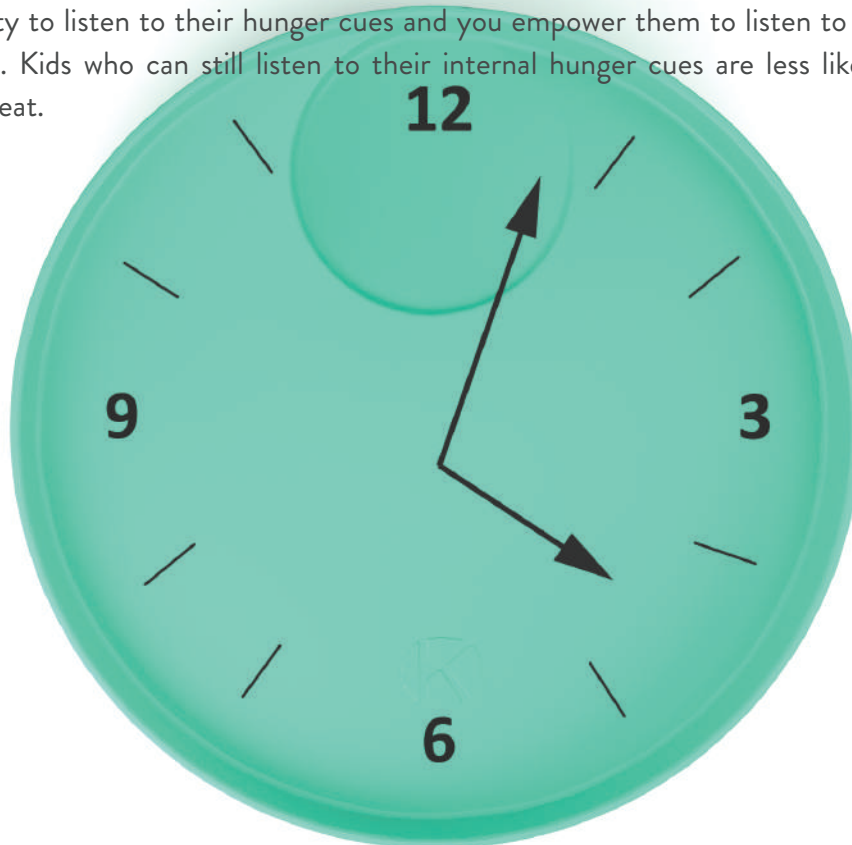
## CREATE & STICK TO A ROUTINE

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### WHY THIS HELPS

First, continuing to offer foods that your picky eater has already declined (maybe time and again) is a way of giving multiple food exposures: kids don't have to eat a food in order to benefit from seeing it. Over time, your child's familiarity with the food will grow and with this comfort comes increased willingness to touch, smell, lick, bite, and even eat the food.

Second, you establish trust in your child. You demonstrate that you trust their ability to listen to their hunger cues and you empower them to listen to those cues. Kids who can still listen to their internal hunger cues are less likely to overeat.



# 10

## BE PATIENT

This is the most annoying of our 10 strategies to tackle picky eating ... Be Patient. (Boring? Maybe, but true.)

Patience is probably the most critical, because like all things in parenting this is a marathon not a sprint. You want to encourage a life-long positive relationship with food, and that takes years.

### WHY THIS HELPS

Young children often touch or smell new foods first - they might even put tiny bits in their mouths and then take them back out again - before they take it any further. Your child might need repeated exposure to a new food (as many as 15 times, often more!) before he takes the first bite, let alone actually eats it.

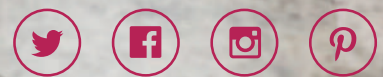
Encourage your child by talking about a food's color, shape, aroma and texture — not whether it tastes good (or how good the food is for them), make sure that you serve something they will eat AND something they might not, and continue providing healthy choices. Do this consistently and your child will grow up with healthy food habits.







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