

FEEDING CHALLENGES IN CHILDREN

PARENTS GUIDE

Do you have concerns about how your child eats?

Children's preferences and approaches to food are constantly changing. However, if you notice a pattern of unexplained concerning behaviours, it may be helpful to consult a healthcare professional to support their development.

WHAT CAN CONCERNING BEHAVIOURS LOOK LIKE?

Unexplained pattern of:

- Choking, coughing, gagging or vomiting during eating
- Tantrums/meltdowns (toddlers/children) or arching back/crying (infants) during mealtimes
- Restricted range of foods; eats less than 20 foods
- Avoiding all food of a particular texture or colour, or an entire food group
- Weight loss

WHAT CAN I DO?

Your GP or maternal child nurse can refer you to Community Health or you can contact them directly. Community Health will hear your concerns and provide referral to the most appropriate health professional.

These may include:

- Speech pathology (chewing/swallowing concern)
- Dietitian (nutrition concern)
- Occupational therapy (behaviour/sensory concern)
- Psychology (anxiety)
- GP (medical/allergy concern)
- Paediatrician (medical/allergy concern)



COMMUNITY HEALTH



1300 665 781



Frankston | Hastings |
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Community Health
Children's services



HOW TO BUILD AN INCLUSIVE MEAL TIME ENVIRONMENT

Food



Strategies to encourage **exploration of food** include:

- **Having deconstructed meals** (components of the meal are separated)
- **Support inclusive lunchboxes:** Plain and/or packaged foods are often safe foods for neurodivergent children.
- Encourage body autonomy. **Eat food in any order.**
- **Offer a variety of food at each mealtime.** This encourages learning about different foods
- **Keep mealtimes regular and consistent.** Children thrive on routine and predictability



Language

Food is just Food

- **Describe the food using your five senses** (sight, smell, sound, touch, taste)
- **Talk about where food comes from** (grows in the ground)
- **Promote positive self-talk.**
Avoid talking about diets or burning off meals



Sensory

Mealtimes can be overwhelming, especially for children with different sensory preferences.

Some strategies include:

- **Sitting on the floor or standing up**
- **Quieter space**
- **Headphones**
- **Lights dimmed**

NEUTRAL FOOD LANGUAGE

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING

Up until late-primary school age, children are concrete thinkers and learn new ideas through play and sensory exploration.

Abstract concepts such as healthy/unhealthy or good/bad/sometimes foods are difficult to understand as they cannot be touched or seen.



BODY IMAGE

Children aged 2-7 years old are forming their sense of body image and cultivating food attitudes and behaviours.

Educators can protect their developing sense of body image by facilitating activities and incorporating neutral food talk to help them learn about food in a way that is age appropriate.

WAYS TO TALK ABOUT FOOD

Explore food using the five senses:

- **Sight:** What colour or shape is the food?
- **Sound:** Does the food make a slurping /crunching noise when we eat it?
- **Smell:** What does it smell like?
- **Touch:** Does the food feel smooth, fuzzy, rough or squishy?
- **Taste:** Does the food taste sweet, salty, sour?

Explain where food comes from:

- How it gets to our plates.
- Different ways to prepare food.
- Is the food from an animal, was the food grown in the ground or on a tree?
- Discuss, describe and name the different foods that make up a meal.

Call foods by their actual name (eg. apple, bread, chips) and avoid labelling foods as "junk" or "treats."



Inclusive Food Provision in Early Education and Care Services

Children with strong sensory aversions often require 'same foods'. That is, foods that they consider safe, appealing and palatable. This may include foods of one colour, texture or temperature e.g. a plain bread roll; a plain bowl of rice or pasta; a familiar sandwich every day. This is a common experience for neurodivergent children. This is NOT a behavioural issue – children with strong sensory preferences and aversions can be supported by a Dietician or Occupational Therapist.



SAME bread roll each day:

Preferred food
– able to eat



Non-preferred food
– unable to eat



Foods SEPARATED on the plate:

Able to eat



Unable to eat



Preferred ALTERNATIVE meal:

Able to eat



Unable to eat



ACECQA - Nutrition, Food and Beverages, Dietary Requirements Policy Guidelines

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-08/NutritionFoodBeveragesDietaryRequireGuidelines.pdf>

Educators:

- ensure children have access to safe drinking water at all times and are offered food and beverages appropriate to each child's needs on a regular basis throughout the day
- monitor children's food and beverage intake to ensure it is adequate and appropriate to each child's needs
- be familiar with the individual needs and action plans for the children in your care with specific dietary requirements, and ensure those requirements are taken into consideration, including on excursions
- maintain ongoing communication with families and other members of staff (including the Nominated Supervisor) about any changes to children's dietary requirements and ensure these changes are reflected in the mealtimes

NQF – Children's Health and Safety

Element 2.1.1 - Each child's wellbeing and comfort is provided for.

Element 2.1.3 - Healthy eating is promoted and appropriate for each child.

Education and Care Services National Regulations

- The food or beverages provided are nutritious and adequate in quantity, and chosen based on each child's dietary requirements (accounting for their growth and development needs, as well as any specific cultural, religious or health requirements) (regulation 79)



Community Health Children's Services

*Are you concerned
about your child's
development?*

*Are the delays
mild to moderate?*



How we can support:

- Screening and assessment
- Collaboration with parents, carers, kinders and childcare to assist you in helping your child reach their best potential.
- Therapy blocks.
- Home programs.

What services are offered?

- Speech Pathology
- Physiotherapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Podiatry
- Dietetics
- Audiology
- Early Educational Advisor
- Aboriginal Healthy Start to Life
- Psychology (with another area of delay)
- Social Work (with another area of delay)

We provide services from:

- Frankston: Frankston Hospital Site
- Hastings: 185 High St, Hastings
- Rosebud: 38 Braidwood Ave, Rosebud
- Aldercourt Hub: Silver Ave Frankston Nth

How to refer:

Parents/Caregivers phone:

1300 665 781.

An Access Worker will talk with the parent/caregiver about their concerns for their child and which services would best meet their needs.

Should you have any queries or require further information about our programs or services provided, please contact our Access Workers on the number above.

Children's Services

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 52
Frankston Vic 3199



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