



How we feed our children is often steeped in our culture, family traditions, and our own childhood memories. Parents often experience anxiety when determining how best or how much to feed their child. They may use food as a way to show love, provide comfort, or even measure how well they are parenting. For these reasons, home visitors should be highly respectful of an individual parent's needs and goals for their child's nutrition and feeding experiences. It is your role to guide families with the best information and help them make the best choice for their family.

As a home visitor, you have the opportunity to build lasting and trusting relationships with a family. This valuable relationship allows you to explore and nurture healthy feeding practices. As you apply the lessons from our PowerPoint series, remember to let the family lead the conversation. Below are some talking points, conversation starters, and strategies to support you at the home visit.

Supporting Families with Infants (0-12 months)

Early Infancy 0-6 months

How does your baby tell you when they are hungry and when they are full?

Talking Points: It is great you are able to recognize how your baby is talking to you. While each baby is a little different they often give early warning signs they are getting hungry. Such as turning their head, putting their hands in their mouth, and even stretching. Do you ever notice any of these? Recognizing these signs can make feeding your baby less stressful and teach your baby that her family understands her.

Can you name some ways you interact with your baby while feeding?

Talking Points: Feeding your baby is a great way to bond and connect with your little one. They learn so much from what you do even if they can't copy your words or faces yet. You can also make silly faces, introduce new words by naming the type of food you are eating, demonstrate how you like the foods you are eating by smiling, or even introduce new colors and textures.

Do you think your baby is a healthy weight? Why?

Talking Points: Babies come in different shapes and sizes. Every baby is different and you know your baby the best. By listening to your babies signs of hunger and fullness, you can support a healthy weight. If you feel your baby isn't a healthy weight, you might want to talk to his doctor about how much and what he is eating. The pediatrician can help you identify your baby's individual growth pattern and needs.

Do you ever have questions about whether they are getting enough or too much to eat?

Talking Points: I think every parent questions at some point whether their baby is getting enough or eating too much. Every baby is different and you know your baby the best. How much they eat may vary from day to day but understanding how your baby tells you they are hungry or full can help you feel assured they are getting enough to eat.

How do you feed your baby?

Talking Points: Feeding your baby can be an important time to learn about and bond with each other. When you have the time and space, you can try to find a calm, quiet corner to feed her. Look in her eyes and learn how she is communicating with you.

Middle and Late Infancy 6-12 months

How will you know when your baby is ready to try solids?

Talking Points: I'm glad to hear you are trying to listen to your baby. Every baby is different and are not always ready to try solids at the same time. When your baby can sit with some support; is able to control her head and neck; and when she is able to swallow and move solids foods. If she is gagging or spitting the food back out, she may not be ready yet.

How does your baby feed themselves?

Talking Points: I'm so glad to hear he is practicing fine motor skills during meals. Letting him grab the spoon can allow him to show you when he is still hungry too. He probably loves exploring his foods but sometimes if he is only playing but not really feeding himself, he may be telling you he is full.

Supporting Families with Toddlers and Preschoolers

What does a meal at your home look like (i.e. Where do you sit? Do you eat together? How do you talk with your child?)?

Talking Points: It seems you are starting to build some meal time routines with him. This is a great idea! It allows you to teach him about healthy eating and give you time to enjoy each other. As he learns about your family routines, he will begin to understand what you expect him to eat and when, how you want him to behave, and how important spending time with him is to you. As he gets older you can start adding more family habits. For example, eating at the same place for every meal, eating as a family as often as possible, letting him help you set the table (or place where they have meals). What are some things you might want to add to your meals together?

How does your child tell you when they are hungry and when they are full?

Talking Points: I'm so glad you are able to recognize these signals from her. As her language develops, she will be able tell you clearly when she is hungry or full. But it is important to let her decide when she wants more or is done eating. This can be really hard for parents as we always seem to worry if our child is eating enough. Letting her listen to her body for hunger and fullness helps her keep this skill for when she is older even as an adult. You might try asking at meal time, "What does your tummy feel like? Does it have enough food or would you like more?"

How do you encourage your child to try new foods?

Talking Points: Picky eating is very normal at this age. Your son is trying to find a balance between independence and his need for direction from you. I know this can be very frustrating especially since you may have to offer a new food to him 15 times before he will try it. It might help to serve a new food when you eat together as a family so he can see you eating it too. Or we can try to pick an activity for our next visit that uses this new food. For example, we could plan an activity where we find green things and you could serve a new green vegetable at your meals that week. We can be creative.

How does your child help with meal time?

Talking Points: It may seem a little early to ask your child to help with meal time but it helps her feel a part of your family habits. It can also be an alternative to using the TV or your phone as entertainment while you prepare food. I would suggest starting small such as letting her set the table with non-breakable items. As she gets older she can even start helping prepare foods like stirring or adding ingredients. Letting her be a helpful part of your meals together can encourage her to try the foods you make. She will also love the extra time she gets to spend with you.

Does your child eat a variety of foods? What do they seem to like best?

Talking Points: Every child has favorite foods but new foods are simply favorite foods waiting to happen. It is important to expose him early to a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, proteins like beans or meat, dairy like cheeses, milk, etc. This gives him time to learn how each food tastes and build healthier habits. By introducing many different foods now, he may actually be a healthier and less picky eater as he gets older. Are there some new foods you might let him try?

Strategies for Families

- Be patient! You may need to offer a new food 10-15 times before your child will accept it. Make sure they see you eating healthy foods to encourage trying it.
- Let your child help you prepare meals. This can be as simple as setting the table, mixing or adding ingredients. They are more likely to try new foods they helped prepare.
- You are your child's first teacher. You can use meal times to talk about colors, shapes, and allow them to explore textures. These are learning opportunities that support what they learn in school.
- Encourage your child to eat until they are full but no more. Try asking, "What does your tummy feel like? Does it have enough food or would you like more?" Try not to worry about whether they cleaned their plate. Instead encourage them to take small amounts.
- Make meal times fun. Tell your child stories from your day, your childhood, or just make a silly story up! They will love to hear your voice and laugh with you.
- How does your baby tell you when she is hungry? Knowing when her signals for when they are getting hungry.
- Use feedings with your new baby as an opportunity to bond. Try to find a quiet place or corner to nurse her, look into her eyes and talk to her. It may seem too early but she is already building language skills by listening and interacting with you.
- Eat meals as a family as often can you. This is how your baby learns.



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