

# Nurturing Children Through Responsive Feeding

## Educators can support children to become competent eaters by practicing responsive feeding.

Responsive feeding: *when an educator responds in a supportive and appropriate way to children's hunger and fullness cues<sup>1</sup>, which:*

- supports the child's self-regulation and a growing sense of self,
- helps children develop **eating competence** by:
  - enjoying a variety of foods,
  - exploring new foods, and
  - respecting their hunger and fullness cues<sup>2</sup>.

Responsive feeding is a mutual relationship between a child and educator based on **trust**<sup>3</sup>: children trust that educators will provide them with food during the day; educators trust that children will eat.

### Educator decides

**What** foods are offered and **when** and **where** children will eat.

### Child decides

**What** foods to eat, **whether** and **how much** to eat.

<sup>1</sup> Health Canada. Nutrition for Healthy Term Infants, 6-24 Months. (2014). Cited January 15, 2024 from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guide/resources/nutrition-healthy-term-infants/nutrition-healthy-term-infants-recommendations-birth-six-months/6-24-months.html#a6>

<sup>2</sup> Satter, E. Eating Competence Nutrition Education with the Satter Eating Competence Model. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour. 2007 Sep-Oct; 39(5 Suppl): S189-S194. Cited January 15, 2024 from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17826701/>

<sup>3</sup> Ellyn's Satter's Institute. Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility in Feeding. (2015). Cited January 31, 2024 from: <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ELLYN-SATTER%E2%80%99S-DIVISION-OF-RESPONSIBILITY-IN-FEEDING.pdf>



## Nurturing Children Through Responsive Feeding



Helping children feel safe and confident to eat according to their hunger and fullness cues is more important than focusing on how much they eat.

### **Provide meals and snacks at regular times, and with enough time to eat.**

This allows children to anticipate what, when and where they will eat. 20-30 minutes for eating is usually enough.

### **Trust that children know how much to eat.**

This helps them recognize and respond to their own hunger and fullness cues. Pressure to eat more or less may do the opposite.

### **Give children time to explore, touch, and taste their food.**

Offer new foods with familiar foods. Be patient; it may take 10–15 exposures to a certain food before a child will accept it. Seeing peers and adults enjoy new foods is a great way for children to be exposed to new foods in a positive way.

### **Allow children to serve themselves from the foods available.**

This gives them control over which foods to eat and how much to put on their plate. It builds their confidence and teaches them to trust their appetite. Serving meals family-style allows children to practice their fine-motor skills, social skills and hand and eye coordination.



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### Understand and embrace diversity in your child care to create a sense of belonging.

It is important to provide opportunities for children to participate in mealtimes that reflect their cultural practices and traditions.

### Eat together.

This strengthens connections, nurtures a positive relationship with food, and contributes to the child's social and emotional development. Remove distractions like screens, toys, and books.

### Be a positive role model.

Leading by example is an impactful way to teach skills that promote eating competence. How educators talk about food matters and can impact a child's relationship with food.

### Put it into practice

Explore how families gather at the table.

What utensils do they use?

What do they eat to celebrate special days?

How do they eat together?



Consult our [Strategies for Mealtime Success](#) resource for tips to respond to different mealtime situations.

For more information on child nutrition, visit [unlockfood.ca](https://unlockfood.ca) or [Canada's Food Guide](#). Call [Health811](#) to speak to a Registered Dietitian at no cost. Your local [public health unit](#) may also be able to offer support.



# Nurturing Children Through Responsive Feeding

## Positive Role Modeling in Action

### Inspire Curiosity

Invite children to see, touch, smell, and taste new foods.



### Use Descriptive Words



This red tomato tastes sweet and juicy! What do you notice about it?

Focus on taste, texture, smell, and colour.

Try not to label foods as "good"/"bad" or "healthy"/"unhealthy".

### Call Foods By Their Names

At your friend's birthday party, did you eat treats?  
CAKE

A cookie is a cookie (not a "treat").  
An apple is an apple (not "a healthy snack").

### Show A Positive Attitude Towards All Bodies

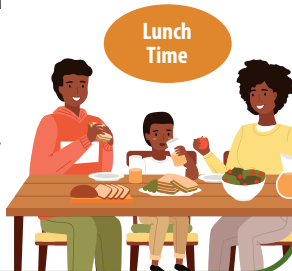
Show we can be happy, healthy, and active at any body size.



### Eat With Children

Choose from the same food and beverages offered to children.

Show children you are open to and excited to try new foods, and enjoy eating them in different ways.



### Respect Hunger And Fullness Cues



If you're still hungry you can have more, but if you're full you don't have to eat anything else.

### Focus On The Meal



Putting away electronic devices when sitting at the table with children.

### Check Your Bias And Language

Refrain from conversations about body size, food eaten, dieting and weight loss.

Stand up for children when other adults or peers mention their weight or physical appearance.

