

Tips for Your Picky Eater on Thanksgiving

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Mealtimes can be a struggle, especially when paired with the stress of preparing or attending a holiday meal. Below are some simple, evidenced-based strategies to help reduce the struggle and stress that can accompany holiday meals:

“You can” language: Although it may be tempting to try to offer incentives to get your child to eat their meal or clean their plate, use of this can ultimately place more stress and anxiety on the child as they feel they have to eat what’s in front of them or they will be in trouble. Offering choices with the use of “you can” language can help take the pressure off of the mealtime experience and give the child some sense of control. Below are some examples:

1. “You can lick your green bean like an ice cream cone!”
2. “You can make a smiley face in your mashed potatoes!”
3. “I am going to smell my piece of pie, you can too!”

Get messy! If your child has never eaten turkey and mashed potatoes in the past, it is unlikely that they are going to eat it for Thanksgiving dinner. One way to start them exploring the foods is to get messy with them. This could look like creating a mashed potato snowman, a yam scarecrow, or playing in the “mud” that is the cranberry sauce! By getting messy with our food, your child is able to explore the textures, smells, and sights of food all the while becoming more comfortable with that food being on their plate.

Try out some Thanksgiving foods before the actual holiday: Pop open a can of cranberry sauce or bake a sweet potato pie together! By introducing these foods to your child before the holiday, you can slowly expose your child to foods that may be present on Thanksgiving Day.

If you are heading to another household, prepare a small lunch box of foods your child will eat. This guarantees that your child has at least one thing to eat during the meal and can still participate in the socialization that occurs around the Thanksgiving table! This doesn’t mean that they cannot explore and play with the turkey, gravy, mashed potatoes and pie however it does take some of the pressure off them (and you) to make sure they have something to eat.