Establishing Successful Mealtime Routines

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Introduction

- The occupation of sharing a meal
- The mealtime dilemma
  - Problem eating and mealtime behaviors
Extent of the Problem

- Common in children
- Consequences
Mealtimes

- Values, beliefs, routines
- Challenges
  - Setting – Environment
  - Self feeding
  - Picky and problem eaters
- Strategies
Mealtime Values & Beliefs

- Cultural
- Societal
- Familial
Mealtimes

- Gathering of family, relatives, friends
- Variety of settings
  - Home, restaurant, preschool, day care
- Mealtime routines
  - Preparing meal
  - Setting table
  - Sitting down at the table
  - Eating the meal
  - Leaving the table
  - Cleaning up
The child’s idiosyncrasies and behaviors impact each routine
Mealtime Challenges

- Mealtime idiosyncrasies
  - Food selectivities
  - Use of favorite cutlery, dishes, cups
  - Demanding to sit in the same chair and position at the table
  - Gagging
  - Refusing to feed self
  - Walking away from meal
Picky Eater vs. Resistant Eater

Normal Eaters       Picky Eaters       Resistant Eaters
Picky Eater

- Food pickiness is very common in toddlers/pre-schoolers
  - 20% of children will have feeding issues before age 5
  - Food pickiness increases between 4-24 months
  - 50% of 2 year olds demonstrate picky eating
Picky Eater

- Food refusals, limited repertoire of foods
- Eats approximately 30 foods
- Nutritional needs met
Resistant Eaters

- Food repertoire less than 20 foods
- Experience food jags
- Child cries and melts down with new foods (anxiety or tantrums)
- Refuses entire categories of food textures or colors, or nutrition groups
Resistant Eaters

- Almost always eats different foods from family
- Persistently reported as a picky eater over multiple well child visits
Resistant Eaters may have:

- Medical issues
- Physical impairments
- Sensory integration dysfunction
- Poor oral motor skills
- Swallowing problems
- Problems with gagging or pocketing food
- Unusual rituals or behaviors related to mealtimes
Medical Challenges

- GI Issues
  - 50-70% of kids with ASD have GI issues

- Swallowing Issues

- Allergies
  - Gluten/Casein

- Sensory Issues
Environmental & Behavioral Factors Contributing to Problem Eating

- Environmental factors
  - Unpredictable mealtime schedules
  - Setting
- Physical context
  - Sounds, smells, sights, chaos
- Food neophobia
  - Fear of new and novel foods
Cultural Roadblocks

- Good parents are responsible for getting their child to eat
- Leaving food is wasteful
- If children are hungry enough, they will eat
- Don’t talk with your mouth full
- Don’t play with your food
Resistant Eaters and Developmental Disabilities

- Sensory integration dysfunction
- Immature respiration
- Delayed oral-motor development
- Limited communication skills
- Rigid behaviors
- Routines
Strategies for Mealtime Participation

- Establish a consistent schedule for all meals and snacks
- Use a timer to schedule the end of the mealtime
- Make sure the schedule includes snacks
- Offer at least one “preferred food” at each meal & snack
- Only water between scheduled meal/snack times
Strategies

- Eat all meals and snacks at the kitchen table
- Portion size
- Avoid coercion
- Keep distractions to a minimum
- Be a strong role model
- Allow the child to participate in setting the table and serving the food
To increase food acceptance

- Discuss the taste, texture and smell of new foods
- Place the new food item near or on the child’s plate during mealtime
- Allow the child to kiss the food goodbye and throw it in the garbage
Tips for mealtime routines

- **Goal:** A calm and supportive atmosphere without disruptions or inappropriate behaviors
- **Let the child know it will be time to eat**
  - **Before meal routine**
    - Wash hands
    - Select plates and utensils
    - Pour a drink
    - Sit down together
Creating new routines around challenging behaviors

- Be patient
- Provide a consistent, supportive mealtime environment
- Do not force child to eat
- Tantrums? Remain calm and without judgment. Remove child from table. Continue meal without child
Thank you! Questions?
References & Resources

http://www.spdparentzone.org/resources/TOP%20TEN%20MYTHS%20OF%20MEALTIME%20IN%20AMERICA.pdf

http://www.spdparentzone.org/resources/When%20Children%20Wont%20Eat.pdf