

Fighting about food can make family mealtimes unpleasant and difficult for everyone at the table. The key to calm, positive mealtimes is a healthy feeding relationship – with a division of responsibilities between adults and children. According to registered dietitian (RD) and child feeding expert Ellyn Satter:

- Adults are responsible for what foods and beverages are served. They are also responsible for where the meal is served – and for making mealtimes pleasant.
- Children are responsible for deciding whether to eat and how much to eat. As they get older, they can learn age-appropriate table manners and mealtime behaviors.

Here are five strategies to having meals without squeals – and for avoiding unpleasant food fights with children. If you need more details about developing a successful feeding relationship with your children, check out books by Ellyn Satter, MS, RD, LCSW: *Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming* and *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family*.



Make regularly scheduled meals a family priority.

YOUNG CHILDREN NEED REASSURANCE of structured meal and snack times. Eating on the run may seem OK for adults, but it doesn't work well for children. Whether you are eating at home or "on the road," take the time to sit down and eat with your child.

Avoid pressuring or forcing children to eat.

MOST ADULTS HAVE GOOD INTENTIONS when they try to force children to eat "healthy" foods or to try new items. The problem with pressure is that it doesn't work. Kids like foods less if they are forced to eat them – or if they are given bribes or rewards.



Model the habits you want children to develop.

YOUNG CHILDREN DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY KNOW how to eat like "big people." They learn how to eat and how to behave at the table by watching you. You are your children's most important role model for developing lifelong, healthy eating habits.

Enjoy the foods you want your children to enjoy.

CHILDREN LEARN TO EAT NEW FOODS by watching other people eat and enjoy them. If you want a child to eat green veggies, serve them regularly in a variety of appealing ways. Eat your green veggies. Talk about how good they taste and how they make you strong.



Have realistic expectations for mealtime behavior.

IT TAKES TIME FOR KIDS to master new skills, like table manners. Adults need to lay out clear expectations for mealtime behaviors and to reinforce appropriate behavior. Kids need to know, ahead of time, they will have to leave the table if they continue misbehaving.