

# Talking at dinner-time

## Rationale:

Talking with your child when you feed him dinner each night helps make talking a regular thing. Talking builds your child's communication and language skills. It is also good for your relationship. When you are enjoying time together, you will probably find that talking comes naturally. You might be surprised how many words you can use to talk about food!

## Age range information

1-3 years

## What you need

Dinner-time talk should fit into your existing dinner routine. You do not need anything extra – just talk with your child as he eats. It is best to minimise distractions by turning off the TV and putting your phone away while you talk.

## How to do it

Here's how to relax and enjoy dinner-time talk:

- Sit near your child, smile and make eye contact while he eats.
- Watch him and take notice of what he is doing and how he is responding to his meal. Comment on what he is feeling or experiencing – for example, 'You like the carrot?', 'Do you want more rice?' or 'No good? Too spicy?'
- Talk about the food he is eating. Use a variety of words to describe its colour, taste, smell and texture. For example, use words like 'green', 'fresh', 'crunchy', 'smooth', 'sweet', 'buttery' and 'cold'. This helps your child learn new words, and also helps him to notice things.
- Keep talking to your child as you clean up after the meal – for example, 'Have you had enough to eat? Let's put your plate in the sink.'
- It is nice to end the meal by gently wiping your child's hands and face with a warm damp cloth. Talk about what you are doing – for example, 'Let's wipe your face and hands now so they are all clean. Does that feel nice?'

## Adapting for children of different ages

Even if your younger child cannot use words yet, he will still be able to communicate his likes and dislikes around food very clearly. For example, he will lean eagerly towards food if he is hungry or turn his head away if he has had enough.

Do not be put off by his body language when you are introducing new food. It takes time and patience for your baby to learn to eat and enjoy different foods. If your baby does not like something, try it again some other time. You might have to try lots of times before your baby accepts a new taste or texture.

Your baby's body language and actions are a form of communication. Talk to him as though you were having a conversation with words and pause after you have asked a question. This gets him used to the rhythm of a conversation.

As children get older it becomes easier for them to join the whole family at dinner-time. If mealtimes are a happy time when the family chats around the table, your child will look forward to meals and enjoy being there. Family meals can strengthen your family relationships and your child's sense of belonging. Most children do not learn table manners until they are around five years old, so try not to expect too much.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

## Recommended Reads

- [Dinner Talk: 365 engaging conversation starters to help you and your family connect](#)
- [The secrets of a happy families: improve your mornings, rethink family dinner, go out and play, and much more](#)
- [Small talk handbook](#)