



Child Development Service



Playfully exploring food

Some children need to explore food with their senses many times before they will eat it.
If your child will not try new or tricky food, they may be willing to playfully explore it with their senses.

The senses are  sight,  smell,  touch,  taste,  sound,  movement,  body position and  internal body awareness.

Explore food using your child's imagination and your creativity. Pretend to be curious adventurers, detectives or scientists.		Play with food outside snack and mealtimes – times where there is no pressure or expectation for your child to eat.		Allow mess, and get ready for it by covering the bench or floor with cloths or newspaper, going to a play area, or go outside.	
Be playful together with: ■ small amounts of food (like yesterday's leftovers) ■ kitchen utensils (like rolling-pins, mashers, cookie cutters, tongs and containers). ■ washable toys.		Talk about colour, size, shape, smell and feel. Use describing words, such as wet, dry, sticky, slippery, rough or smooth. Ask 'I wonder...': ■ 'I wonder if this feels hard or soft?' ■ 'I wonder what happens when we mix these colours?'		If your child becomes bothered by a sensation, stop immediately. ■ Cover or move the food away. ■ Offer a washcloth or paper towel for wiping their hands.	
Allow time for your child to look, smell and touch the same new or tricky food many times at their pace. 'Think out loud' about what their eyes, nose, hands and body are discovering.		If your child doesn't like touching food directly, put it in a plastic bag. ■ Accept their different sensory preferences. ■ Be curious about their experiences. ■ Show empathy for their feelings.		If your child becomes distressed, sit with them until their emotions move through them and they calm down. Then, ask what their senses noticed and how they feel.	
Consider involving sisters/brothers, relatives or friends, so your child can watch or just listen from another room.		Make sure both you and your child are feeling emotionally calm and not tired.		Always finish with something your child enjoys (like a song, a hug or a story), so your playful exploration ends with safety and delight.	

Remember, this is about play, discovery and connection, not eating.

Success with eating may come after lots of emotionally safe experiences of playfully seeing, smelling and touching new or tricky food.



Where	Activities to try	Food possibilities	Equipment to get ready
Inside			
■ table and chair ■ picnic rug or sheet ■ in the empty bath or shower ■ bench top with a step for your child to stand on	■ Hide food under containers and guess which container it is under. ■ Wrap paper towel or tissues around food like a baby or small animal. ■ Drop or 'post' food into containers. ■ Prepare food for toys to stomp on or pretend to munch (for example cut, slice, chop, grate, roll, mash or mix pieces of food). ■ Make a picture with food on a plate. ■ Make a collage of food on a tray. ■ Use a small pastry or paint brush – or the tail of a dinosaur – or the head of a horse – to paint with hummus, nut spread, pate or yoghurt.	■ legume/bean mix ■ hummus, nut spread, pate, yoghurt ■ boiled eggs ■ cheese ■ cooked chicken, meat or meatballs ■ fruit pieces ■ raw and cooked vegetables ■ cooked pasta shapes ■ crackers	■ washable toy truck, train, car, plane, rocket, dinosaur, farm animal, people or doll ■ small and large containers ■ chopping board, grater, rolling pin, spoon, child-safe knife, tongs, cookie cutters, masher, bowl, pastry or paint brush ■ baking trays or a large plastic plate ■ leftover cake decorations ■ wash cloths or paper towel to wipe their hands ■ small ziplock bags to put food in if your child does not like touching food
Outside			
■ pavement ■ picnic rug or sheet ■ lawn ■ at home or at a park	■ Carry food in a toy truck, train, car, plane, rocket – or on a spoon – to visit the dinosaur, farm animals, or people in the garden or a park. ■ Try to guess if a food, container or object will float or sink in a tub of water. ■ Pretend pieces of food, containers and objects are dropping from the sky like rain into the tub of water. ■ Find things in the garden or the park that match the colour or shape of food.	■ legume/bean mix ■ hard boiled eggs with and without shell ■ fruit pieces ■ raw and cooked vegetables ■ cooked pasta shapes ■ crackers	■ washable toy truck, train, car, plane, rocket, dinosaur, farm animal, people or doll ■ containers and objects that float and sink ■ tub of water ■ wash cloths or paper towel to wipe their hands ■ small ziplock bags to put food in if your child does not like touching food

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for people with a disability.

For more information about the metropolitan **Child Development Service** scan the QR code, visit cahs.health.wa.gov.au/ChildDevelopment or phone [1300 551 827](tel:1300551827).

