

FEEDING AND EATING

Messy play with food



Speech Pathology

Some children need time to explore a new food or texture before they are happy to eat it. Other children might be sensitive to trying foods because of frequent gagging or negative experiences associated with feeding. Exploring food can help a child become familiar with new food textures. This may reduce negative responses such as gagging. This can be achieved through 'messy play' with food.

What is messy play?

This is a type of play that:

- Encourages children to touch and explore different textures with their eyes, hands, bodies and mouths.
- Helps children become familiar and comfortable with different textures at their own pace.

Where?

- In a high chair, sitting on the floor, at the table, or anywhere your child usually eats!
- Put newspaper or a plastic sheet under your child's chair to catch any mess.

How?

- Children learn by watching others and copying. Encouragement also helps!
- Show your child how to touch foods by dipping your finger, training tooth-brush or stick of food into a new food. Lick the food from your finger and go back for more!
- Don't push her to lick her fingers but you can give gentle praise when she does.
- It is okay if your child 'squishes' foods in her hands. She is just learning about the feel of the food before she's ready to put it in her mouth.
- If your child is not really copying yet, you can gently guide her hands to play with and hold foods.
- Have fun!



Some people might find it difficult to allow a child to 'play' with their food. If you are concerned about wasting food, or being messy, use foods that are inexpensive and have been easy to prepare. Or, just mash up the food that you are eating.

For more information about messy play visit the 'Messy Eaters' article on the Raising Children Network, www.raisingchildren.net.au

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