

A child's interests are

Windows of Opportunity

to fun and enjoyable learning

Experiences with
food and eating
 are powerful everyday
learning activities
 for many young children



Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AT HOME**

During meals

- Young children learn many things by watching and copying, so let your baby or young child see you enjoying a variety of healthful foods and using the table manners you would like for him to learn. Encourage him when he tries to do something like you do: "I see you're holding your own spoon just like Daddy! What a big boy you are to eat your soup with a spoon!"
- Talk about the foods that your child is eating—saying their names and describing how they look and how they taste. "Try this crispy apple slice. It's cool and sweet. Do you like the apple?"
- Use a hand-over-hand strategy to help your young child participate in passing dishes and serving at the table. "Daddy would like more rice. Would you like to help me pass him the rice bowl? Thank you!" "Do you want some more applesauce? Would you like to help me use this spoon to serve some applesauce into your dish?"



In the kitchen

- Let your child watch you prepare meals and "help" as she is interested and able. For example, you might let her pour or spoon ingredients into a bowl or pot before you put it on the stove, or take a turn at stirring.
- Show your 2- to 3-year-old the pictures and words on food cans and boxes as you cook. Make a game of guessing what's in the container. Ask him if he wants to help you find cans or boxes of ingredients you need. "Would you look in the cabinet and find me a box of noodles? Which box has noodles in it? Yes! You see the picture of macaroni noodles and cheese. Yummy!"
- Let your young child help you put away groceries when you return from food shopping. Together divide your purchases into things that go on shelves and things that go in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Let your child help you match food items that are the same. When preparing a snack, take a banana from a bowl of fresh fruit on the table, show it to her, and ask her if she would like to find another banana in the bowl that you can slice for snack. Praise her for locating a banana.

Places to learn and activities to enjoy **AWAY FROM HOME**

Eating a meal in a restaurant

- Look at and talk about a picture menu together.
- Help your child point to or tell the waiter what she would like to eat and drink.
- Practice saying “please” and “thank you” to the server or other restaurant staff who give food to or take plates from your child.
- Let your child hand money to the cashier and receive change.
- Look for and take advantage of new experiences eating in a restaurant might provide for your young child, such as walking through a revolving door, pushing a tray along a rail at a cafeteria or buffet, pushing buttons on a drink dispenser to fill a cup, taking napkins from a napkin dispenser, tearing paper off a drinking straw, tasting an unfamiliar food, etc.
- Show your child the restaurant’s sign and talk about the name, letters, and colors. When you pass the sign again on a car or bus ride or a walk, remind your child what the sign says and talk about your experience of eating there.

Supermarket

- Your toddler might enjoy pushing a child-sized shopping cart through the store and placing some of the family food purchases in it.
- Many supermarkets have shopping carts with special infant seats attached so that even the youngest children can ride along safely and enjoy the sights, sounds, and action as you select and buy food for your family. Talk to your baby as you shop, showing and letting him touch the items you add to your cart.



Taking along a picnic

- Let your child help you prepare and pack simple snacks or a meal to take along on all sorts of outings.
- Choose interesting, creative spots to enjoy your picnic. How about the banks of a stream or pond, a bench in a city square where you can “people watch,” the grounds of a college where you can watch students tossing around a Frisbee, or the sidelines at a basketball or softball game at a community park? Talk about all the exciting things going on during your meal.



Farmer’s market or tailgate market

- Say the names of the different fruits and vegetables on display as you look at them. Let your child hold or touch them, if possible, as you say their names and talk about their colors, shapes, weights, textures, smells, etc. “Wow! Look at these pretty red tomatoes. Mmmm, doesn’t that smell good?”
- Let your young child help you look for specific items. “We need to buy green beans. Let’s look around and see if you can help me find some.”
- Exchange smiles and greetings with vendors.
- Accept vendors’ offers to let your child have a taste of their produce—perhaps a juicy melon cube, a crunchy sugar-snap pea, or a bite of tangy pineapple. Say its name and talk about how it tastes. “Should we buy some to take home?”
- Let your child pick out produce, drop it in a paper bag, and hand it to a vendor to weigh.

