



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

## Creating a Positive Meal Environment

A child's eating environment may be as important as the foods he eats. Positive interactions, encouragement, and patience are all elements of creating an engaging eating experience for young children. These positive attitudes towards food and mealtime help children form lifelong healthy eating habits.

Here are some general ways to make it easier for children to enjoy their meals:

- ♥ **Provide child-sized furniture and utensils.** Use a child-sized table and chairs or arrange chairs, high chairs, and booster seats around the dining table for meals. In addition, use child-sized plates and utensils that are made of materials that are smaller and difficult to break. You can also look into having small spoons and plates with edges or a small, shallow bowl which helps younger children scoop their food more easily.
- ♥ **Plan for spills and easy clean up.** Use cloth placemats or table covers along with, or instead of, plastic tablecloths. These will absorb liquids (and are washable) for a less stressful meal. When spills do occur, you can use it as a learning opportunity to teach the child how to help clean them up.
- ♥ **Sit together.** During meals, sit with your child, not hover above him. You can make your own plate with similar food or sit near him and talk about the types of foods that he's eating, describing the texture, colors, and taste as he eats.

In addition, as your child grows older, responsiveness to his hunger, allowing choices toward the foods he eats, and involving him in



meal preparation are ways to create a positive meal environment. This newsletter will explore these topics, as well as give age-appropriate activities for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

### This newsletter includes:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

# Infants

For baby, creating a positive feeding experience for him involves learning his cues both for hunger and fullness. You may think crying is the only sign that baby is hungry, but it's actually a sign of distress. Watching for and responding early to your baby's hunger signs may help prevent him from crying. Here are some signs that baby is hungry:

- ♥ Getting excited when he sees food.
- ♥ Becoming more alert and active.
- ♥ Sucking on hands or lip smacking.
- ♥ Moving head toward spoon and tries to bring it to mouth

As baby eats, use that time to bond with him. He enjoys listening to your voice, so talk or sing to him and make eye contact with him. Encourage him to relax and feel safe while eating by cuddling or rocking him. He will let you know that he's full when he:

- ♥ Releases or "falls off" the bottle.
- ♥ Turns away from nipple/bottle.
- ♥ Seals lips together.
- ♥ Relaxes his body and opens his fists.



## Activity for Infants: *Nursing Time*

Materials:

- A soft sock
- A baby bottle

What to Do:

1. Hold your baby close to you while you feed him.
2. When you are breastfeeding or bottle feeding, let him hold onto your finger or grasp your clothing or a soft blanket. Gently stroke his head or arm during feeding and softly talk or sing to him.
3. When your baby gets older, if you give him water in a bottle, place a soft, fuzzy sock over the bottle. The sock should fit snugly over the bottle but not cover the cap or nipple. Other family members can help feed him this way.
4. As your baby's hands reach around the bottle, talk about what he is feeling: "The bottle feels soft."

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*



# Toddlers

Your toddler is learning to navigate his world, communicate, and control some parts of his life. Eating is one of the first areas he will attempt to show his preferences by wanting to do things his way. You can help by giving him appropriate amounts of freedom when it comes to choosing foods and eating them, allowing him to be a more active participant of his meals, and being responsive to his signs of fullness by not forcing him to finish everything on his plate.

Here are some ideas to try:

- ♥ **Present a variety of healthy foods that he can choose from.** Include some established favorites and some new foods to make up a menu. You can include different varieties of the same food in a dish, such as different shaped pasta. Foods like pasta, beans, and peas offer many different shapes, colors, and textures. Have your child select which of the acceptable choices he wants.

- ♥ **Give age-appropriate responsibilities.** Toddlers can: help set the table by carrying child-safe unbreakable items to the table (napkins, utensils, plastic cups), wipe table tops with a sponge or cloth, pour milk from a toddler-sized pitcher to a cup, and clean up their own spills with cloths or paper towels.”



## Activity for Toddlers: *Placemats*

Materials:

- Construction paper
- Jumbo crayons or washable markers
- Clear contact paper
- Scissors (for adult use only)

What to Do:

1. Invite your child to decorate a sheet of construction paper with drawings.
2. Cover each side of his decorated sheet with clear contact paper.
3. Ask your child to tell you about his picture.
4. Talk with him about what a placemat is and how it is used to keep the table clean.
5. You can continue the activity by having your child create a placemat for each member of the family. Help him think about how to make each placemat special in some way- include a drawing or photo of the person, magazine pictures of favorite foods, and each person's name.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*





# Preschoolers

As your child gets older, you can create a positive meal environment for him by involving him in the food preparation. Cooking with children requires patience; it can be messy and doesn't always turn out the way the recipe intended. However, when you involve your child in meal preparation, he learns about nutrition, gains a sense of accomplishment, and he may be more willing to try foods that he has helped to prepare.

Here are some ideas to try with your child:

- ♥ **Allow him to use his hands to:** knead and form round shapes of dough, rinse and scrub fruits and vegetables, and peel loose skinned oranges, bananas, or hard-boiled eggs.
- ♥ **Allow him to use utensils to:** mix ingredients such as batter using a spoon and a large bowl; spread soft spreads such as hummus onto bread using a spatula and add dry and liquid ingredients to a recipe using measuring spoons or cups.



## Activity for Preschoolers: *Reading a Recipe Together*

Materials:

Your favorite recipe  
Ingredients in recipe

What to Do:

1. Choose a simple recipe with only a few ingredients and steps. Look for something that has things your child can measure and mix and does not require a stove.
2. Read the recipe aloud to your child, starting with the ingredients.
3. As you read the ingredients, point to the recipe and show him each item. If the word or item is new to your child, talk about what it is.
4. Have your child help prepare the ingredients for the recipe by counting eggs or spooning the flour into the measuring cup.
5. Follow the steps in the recipe, talking about what comes first then what comes next. As you add each ingredient, allow your child to help. Call attention to how the mixture changes as each ingredient is added.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)*



# How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

## Physical Development

- ♥ Learn through his senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching
- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles, fingers, hands, and toes

## Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Feel important and good about himself
- ♥ Learn to cooperate with others

## Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Increase his observation, listening and understanding skills, and attention span

## Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop his curiosity about how things work
- ♥ Increase mathematical concepts such as quantity and comparing



## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Praise his efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

### Hawaiian Papaya Salsa

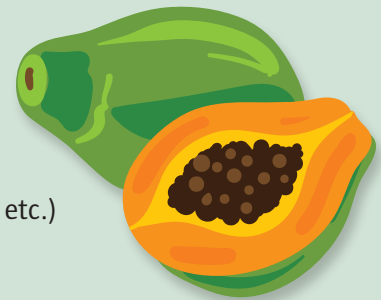
Adapted from *Farm to Keiki* by Tiana Kamen

#### Ingredients:

- 2 cups papaya, ripe, peeled, seeded and diced
- ¼ cup red onion, diced
- 2 Tablespoons garden herbs minced (cilantro, oregano, thai basil, parsley, etc.)
- 2 Tablespoons lime juice
- Pinch of salt and pepper

#### Directions:

1. Prepare all the ingredients together with your child. As you peel, de-seed, and chop the ingredients, talk about how each item smells, feels and looks.
2. Add all ingredients into a bowl and mix them together.
3. Eat with multigrain crackers, whole grain pita or vegetable sticks. You can even add the salsa to tacos and burritos.





## Resources

### Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures

<https://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/>

This website has tips and resources for child care providers and families to make positive changes to work toward a healthier future for children.

### Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

<https://www.eatright.org/for-kids>

This site features articles, tips, and videos on a variety of topics related to nutrition. Check out tips on how to make your own baby food, watch a video on how to cook with kids, and try some delicious recipes!



## Suggested Books

Recommended by **Hawai'i State Public Library** [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### Infants and Toddlers

***Eat! Baby Faces*** by Roberta Grobel Intrater

This little board book features pictures of babies in a variety of moods, giggling, laughing, yawning while eating! It's the perfect mealtime book for your infant.

***Rah, Rah Radishes: A Vegetable Chant*** by April Pulley Sayre

This children's book has photographs of vegetables and rhyming text that celebrates vegetables in a colorful way.

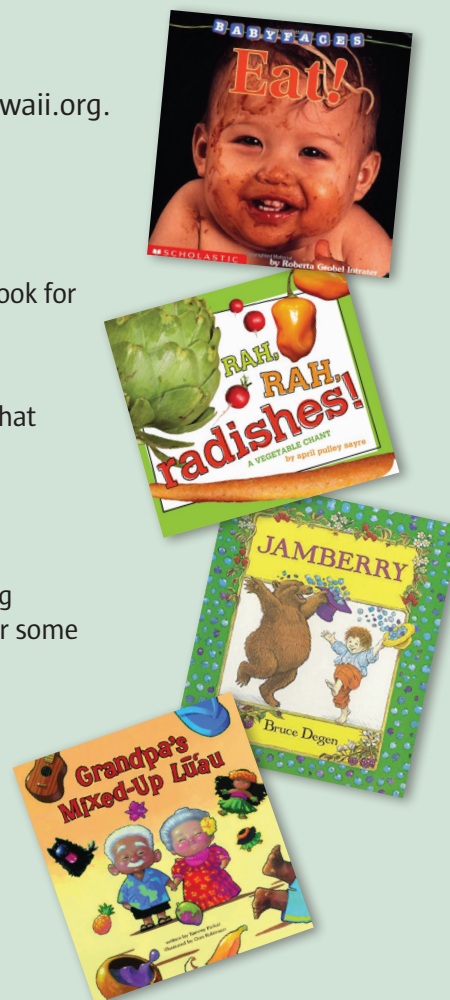
### Preschoolers

***Jamberry*** by Bruce Degen

This bestselling classic features a berry-loving boy and the berry-picking adventures he goes on with a bear. This will make your keiki hungry for some berries.

***Grandpa's Mixed Up Lu'au*** by Tammy Paikai

Grandpa needs Grandma to shop for a lu'au but there's many funny misunderstandings that leads to a funny and happy party for all.



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