



Culture In Context

Feeding Development

Issues with feeding may be caused by a myriad of factors including physical or developmental disabilities, illnesses, allergies, or sensory preferences. Having to make changes to their typical diet and ways of sharing meals can be hard on families. It is necessary to understand what is important to families as you support them in providing what their children need to grow and thrive.

1. Culture, society, and backgrounds have a strong influence on all aspects of feeding and meal times (i.e., what foods are eaten, how food is prepared, how it is served, and what happens during the meal itself). Be careful to avoid assumptions by taking the time to fully understand what matters to families and their reasons behind choices they make regarding feeding and meals.
2. Personal and cultural views vary widely. For example, there are differing views on what is best to feed infants and young children or when and how to switch from breastmilk or formula to other foods. There is no one right way to feed children. You may need to put aside some of your own personal opinions of what you feel is best, especially if it doesn't have specific evidence to uphold it.
3. Many cultures have specific foods that are commonly eaten and served to young children. These foods may be unfamiliar to you. Let the family teach you!
4. Use of utensils varies among different cultures. Some cultures do not put as much emphasis on self-feeding at a young age or may serve mainly finger foods. Talk to families about what foods they eat with utensils, when those foods are served to children, and when they expect their children to start using utensils.

5. Recommended amounts of different types of foods for children may not match with how a family typically eats. Keep this in mind when making suggestions of ways to add calories or discussing a particular diet that may prove helpful for a specific illness.