

Mealtimes provide an opportunity for your child to develop good eating behaviours.

Mealtimes are when children can:

- Learn about healthy eating and food variety
- Make some of their own food choices
- Think about how hungry or full they feel
- Talk together with parents, other family members and friends about their day and about the food at the meal
- Observe their parents as role models for healthy eating behaviours

Here are some tips to ensure relaxed, happy and positive mealtimes in your home:

- Ask your child to help in meal planning – ask them for some ideas about what they would like to have for meals over the coming week
- Ensure your child sits down to eat and is comfortable at meal and snack times
- Get your child involved in helping to set the table as well as clearing dishes at the end of the meal
- Expect a bit of mess at mealtimes, remember - children learn through play. However, throwing or spitting of food should not be allowed
- Encourage your child to try new foods, however never force or pressure your child to eat
- Be a good role model – eat the foods you expect your child to eat
- Your child will often instinctively know when they are hungry and when they have had enough to eat – so listen to them when they talk about their hunger level
- Food should never be used to comfort, as a reward or denied as a punishment for behaviour
- Avoid labelling foods “good” or “bad”- keep discussions about food positive and focus on the health benefits as well as shape, colour and variety

Remember, if children are tired they will be less interested in trying new foods.

