

# “Snack Time” for Children with Autism



Improve Social Skills & Decrease Picky Eating

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## Course Description

- Learn how to use snack time to help your child overcome mealtime challenges such as:
  - extremely narrow food selections
  - ritualistic eating behaviors (e.g. no foods can touch)
  - meal-related tantrums
- We will explore ways to improve your child’s social skills during mealtime and how to carryover these skills into other environments!

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## Learning Outcomes

- Identify 5 activities that will help a child with Autism improve their social skills
- Describe the relationship between delayed social skills and picky eating
- Determine the role of using snack time at home/school to improve feeding and social skills

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## Snack Time vs. Mealtime

<p><b>Snack Time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>short duration</li> <li>small snack (protein, fruit/veggie and carb)</li> <li>short social situation</li> <li>transition time between meals</li> <li>time for introduction of new foods</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mealtime</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>long duration</li> <li>large meal</li> <li>eat and enjoy favorite foods</li> <li>longer social situation</li> </ul>
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# 10 Ways to Overcome Picky-Eating During Snack Time

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## Overcome Picky-Eating During Snack Time

- Positioning**
  - No feet dangling in a chair, feet flat on the floor
  - Desk/table at chest height
  - 90 degree angle
- Pause**
  - Pause/pray at the beginning of snack time
  - Pause/praise at the end of snack time
- Presentation**
  - Presentation is key for our kids
  - Highlight their obsession
- Products**
  - Have the right products for the right age, ability or interest

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### Overcome Picky-Eating During Snack Time (cont'd)


5. **Packaging**
  - Give purees in a bowl and not out of the jar
  - Give fruit & veggie pouches out of the pouch
  - Give all food out of packaging
6. **Preference**
  - There has to be a preferred food on the plate
7. **Play**
  - They need to have a chance to play and explore the food
8. **Portion Size**
  - Know the portion sizes for your child's age



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### Overcome Picky-Eating During Snack Time (cont'd)

9. **Plate**
  - We have to have a plate of food too.
  - A child's chances of picky eating increases if parents, school staff, other adults and other children in their environment tend to avoid certain foods.
  - Modeling good eating habits like eating fruit and vegetables & focus less on picky behaviors. (Galloway 2005)
10. **Practice**
  - If kids eat healthy with their teachers & therapists then eating is not such a battle at home.
  - Practice is how we all learn something new!
  - All of these tips can help overcome picky eating (narrow food selections, ritualistic eating behaviors, meal-related tantrums etc.) & make mealtime less stressful!



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## Snack Time Feeding Tips!



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### Snack Time Tips!

“Snack Time”: transition time between meals & a time for introduction of new foods.


1. **Taste & Rotate:** taste for a few days, then rotate a new taste, & bring it back. They will usually tolerate it the 1st time & enjoy it 2nd time
2. **Temperature:** try frozen fruits & veggies (cold/crunchy texture numbs gums & tongue & feels like a sweet treat)
3. **Try:** something new & keep trying 15 – 30 times
4. **Theme:** Be creative and make some simple food art on a happy face
5. **Trash:** Have them put away dishes & throw leftover food in the trash



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### Snack Time Tips!

6. **Teach:** Don't restrict foods, but teach them about healthy ones
7. **Thirsty:** Blend up some fruit & veggies in a smoothie or juice
8. **Tolerant:** Be patient and use thoughtful language
9. **Touch:** The first step to eating might be to touch it. So ask them to hand it to you. As they get braver, try messy food play.
10. **Therapy:** Seek out therapy from a Speech Language Pathologist or Occupational Therapist who specializes in feeding & swallowing disorders.



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## Snacks & Socialization



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### Use Snack Time to Improve Social Skills

- Why do we want to improve social skills?
  1. Decrease Bullying
  2. Build friendships
  3. Carryover these skills into other environments
- Long Term Goal is: To improve mealtime & have lasting friendships!




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## 1. Bullying

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### Why Picky Eaters Become Targets for Bullying

- Generally, children who are bullied have one or more of the following risk factors:
  - Perceived as different from their peers
  - Perceived as weak or unable to defend themselves
  - Perceived as depressed, anxious, or have low self esteem
  - Perceived as less popular than others and have few friends
- Does this sound like someone you know?
  - Autism?
  - Picky eater?
- Know these risk factors and discuss with family and staff




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### Bullying's Impact on Health

- Bullying negatively impacts the health of children with Autism who are picky
- Hunger & picky eating impacts a child's ability to learn and to handle stress. Especially the added stress of being bullied.
- Hungry/picky eating children struggle with grades, test scores, attendance, emotional & behavioral well being. These struggles are more difficult if they are bullied.
- Delayed social skills and picky eating places children with Autism at more risk for being bullied
- All of us play critical roles in helping children with Autism who are picky eaters be healthy & be ready to learn!




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### Three Types Of Bullying

- Verbal: saying or writing mean things.
  - Teasing
  - Name-calling
- Social: hurting someone's reputation or relationships.
  - Leaving someone out on purpose
  - Embarrassing someone in public
- Physical: hurting a person's body or possessions.
  - Taking or breaking someone's things
  - Making mean or rude hand gestures (stopbullying.gov)




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### Tips to Stop Bullying

1. Look for signs of bullying, especially at mealtime & holidays
2. Listen to the child who is bullied & discuss in private
3. Believe the child's story & establish trust
4. Assure the child that they are not alone & that it's not their fault
5. Come up with a plan together to stop the bullying
6. Talk to parents and staff and get them on board with your plan



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## 2. Friendships

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### Easy & Fun Activities that Improve Social Skills

- Food Games
  - Alfredo Food Fight
  - Slamwich
- Conversation Starters
  - Lunch Box Love
  - Family Talk
- Board Games
  - Maxwell Manor
  - Say and Do
- Video Modeling
  - Bloopers
- Home Made Games
  - I Spy
  - Use their obsession



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### Building Friendships at Snack Time

- **Don't tell them WHAT to do** ("Look at me")
  - TEACH them what to do ("What color are my eyes? Oh, now I can tell that you are really interested in me.")
- **Body Language:** what are your arms saying? What are your legs saying? What is your body saying?
- **Observation:** Observe how your peers are behaving
- **Smile:** Start with a smile
- **Volume:** Speak at the same volume as your peers
- **Think:** Think about what you want to say




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### Building Friendships at Snack Time (cont'd)

- **Listen:** Listen with your body and make ONE comment when they are done that is NOT about your favorite topic
- **Initiate a conversation:** "What are you eating?"
- **Extend a conversation:** "How did you like the \_\_\_?"
- **End a conversation with kindness:** "Thanks for eating with me today!"



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### Building Friendships at Snack Time by Talking About Sensory

Social skills and sensory feeding challenges:

- **Sensory difficulties** (over-responsiveness, under-responsiveness, or mixed responsiveness)
  - 7 senses (environmental sounds, light, visual clutter, touch, proximity of others, voices)
- Preference for **non-social stimuli** leading to intense interests
- Patterns of food acceptance or rejection based on manner of **presentation or food texture**
- Consumption of a **smaller variety of foods** than the variety consumed by other family members or peers
- (ASHA Practice Portal - [asha.com](http://asha.com))




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## 3. Carryover Skills to other Environments

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### Carryover Skills to Other Environments

- Establish trust while being creative & patient during snack time
- Mealtime structure & mealtime habits
- Limit Distractions (Iwata, Riordan, Wohl, & Finney, 1982)
- Food art: Making Mealtime ezipz: Fun Ways to Fill the Happy Mat
- Research demonstrated that if a learned reaction to food is negative, it leads to appetite suppression. (Booth 1990)

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### Carryover Skills to Other Environments (cont'd)

- Home environment
  - Snacks in home feeding therapy
  - Snacks at home with siblings
  - Snacks at play dates in the home
- School environment
  - Snacks in therapy
  - Snacks with one friend
  - Snacks with classroom
  - Snacks at lunchtime

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### Carryover Skills to Other Environments (cont'd)

- Outside Environment
  - Snacks at the park
  - Snacks at a restaurant
  - Snacks at school events
  - Snacks at birthday parties
  - Snacks at holiday events

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### Closing Thoughts

<p><b>Picky eating</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can cause social isolation</li> <li>• Increase the risk of being bullied</li> <li>• Limit social skill practice</li> </ul>	<p><b>Snack Time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can improve picky eating</li> <li>• Increase calorie consumption</li> <li>• Improve social skills</li> <li>• Improve mealtime</li> <li>• Have lasting friendships</li> </ul>
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### Questions?

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## Resources

- ezipfun.com (Therapist approved & award winning feeding products & outstanding blog)
- Winkelman, Laurain, Robertson, (2016) Making Mealtime expz: Fun Ways to Fill the Happy Mat
- Spectrumspeech.com (Dawn Winkelman's private practice)
- Dr.Green.com (Excellent Pediatrician and outstanding blog)
- Fernando & Potock, (2015) Raising A Healthy, Happy Eater: A Stage-by-Stage Guide to Setting Your Child on the Path to Adventurous Eating
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