

# Understanding Your Child's Development of Eating Skills

# Land acknowledgement

The lands, waters, nature and sky that Grandview Kids is privileged to exist within have long been home to the Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg. We acknowledge the lands of the traditional and treaty territories covered under the Williams Treaties, including the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation and the Chippewa Nation of Georgina Island, Beau Soleil and Rama. We are responsible for building stronger relationships with clients, caregivers, partners and colleagues from First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. Through our shared values of belonging, excellence, connection, discovery and celebration, Grandview Kids commits to seeking truth and upholding reconciliation.

# Vision

Every child and youth living at their full potential

# Mission

Supporting children and youth with physical, communication and developmental needs to live, learn and play



# Values



## Belonging

Creating a caring environment by welcoming, respecting and including everyone.

Advocating to make the community more accessible and inclusive for all.

Removing barriers to ensure equitable access to services.

Embracing diversity by listening to and amplifying unique perspectives.



## Excellence

Providing safe, family-centred, efficient, high-quality care.

Maintaining a positive work environment to help Team Grandview thrive.

Mobilizing knowledge within Grandview Kids and across the system.

Being accountable for our actions, committed to transparency and ethical decision-making.



## Connection

Valuing clients and caregivers as our best partners in care.

Collaborating across Team Grandview to deliver exceptional care.

Anticipating community needs through continuous engagement.

Partnering with other providers to better connect the system.



## Discovery

Enabling clients to discover their own potential.

Embracing growth and change.

Re-imagining what currently exists to innovate solutions.

Integrating cutting-edge science and research into our work.



## Celebration

Recognizing Team Grandview's diverse skills and contributions.

Honouring inchstone and milestones, using a strengths-based approach.

Achieving the best possible outcomes for clients and their families.

Inspiring hope for the future.

# Agenda

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1. Understand how eating skills develop
2. Understand how kids gain independence with eating skills over time
3. Learn how parents and other caregivers can support the process
4. Learn some strategies to support your child in exploring a variety of foods
5. Learn about occupational therapy
6. How to connect with Grandview kids

# What are Eating Skills?

- The skills your child learns to do with their mouth
- The skills your child learns to do with their hands to grasp and manipulate foods/utensils
- Includes all of our senses





**Eating isn't  
easy!**

# Developmental Milestones

Age	Oral Motor Milestone
0-3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Rooting reflex is present</li><li>Suck-swallow reflex is present</li><li>Phasic bite reflex is present (appears to start chewing when lower gum is massaged)</li><li>Tongue 'cups' on bottle or breast to provide a channel for liquid flow</li><li>Gag reflex is on the front third of the tongue</li></ul>
4-6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Rooting reflex comes under control</li><li>Phasic bite reflex comes under control</li><li>Suck becomes more active</li><li>Munch-chew pattern is active by 5-6 months</li><li>Spoon feeding can be introduced</li><li>Tongue protrudes and retracts in anticipation of the spoon</li><li>Gag reflex is moving back, slightly less sensitivity</li></ul>



# Developmental Milestones

Age	Oral Motor Milestone
7-9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Mixed tongue movements (up/down, in/out, side-to-side)</li><li>Active lip movements, coordination for spoon feeding improves</li><li>Lip closure when swallowing</li><li>Cup drinking begins (jaw is still unstable)</li><li>Munch chew is present when food is placed on molar ridge</li><li>Beginning to transfer food from side of the mouth to centre and centre to side</li><li>Gag reflex is on the back third of the tongue</li></ul>
10-12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>True suck is established for straw drinking (takes single sips)</li><li>Improved lip closure when swallowing liquids</li><li>Cleans lower lip with teeth</li><li>Rotary chew pattern is developing</li><li>Starting to handle a variety of food textures</li><li>Gag reflex moves towards back of throat</li></ul>

# Developmental Milestones

Age	Oral Motor Milestone
13-15 months	Jaw, lips and tongue begin to move separately from each other Improved jaw stability for biting Some lip closure during chewing Can maintain a continuous suck-swallow during cup drinking
16-18 months	Good controlled bite without head movement Good control of liquid Enjoying family foods
19-24 months	Uses tongue to clean lips Can straw drink with longer sucks and continuous suck-swallow Can chew with lips closed Chews meat completely
25-36 months	“Adult” chewing pattern Mature swallow

# Seating and Support

- Head and trunk control should be sufficient to maintain upright position, even when starting in a highchair
- Ensure legs and feet are well supported (i.e., adjust foot tray on highchair, put a box/stool under feet when eating on dining chairs)
- Child should be positioned with either a highchair tray or positioned directly to the table
- Eat together as much as possible, at the table you would typically eat at (or near the table if using a highchair)

# Self-Feeding Skills



# Developmental Milestones

Age	Fine Motor Milestone
9-12 months	Can hold bottle independently Begins to explore small open cup Begins to hold and explore spoon Starting to pick up food using either a raking grasp (all fingers) or a pincer grasp (thumb and index finger)
12-15 months	Pincer grasp becomes more refined and accurate Releasing food into the mouth by hand becomes more accurate Starting to practice dipping spoon into food and bringing to mouth Starting to use more graded control when drinking from open cup
2 years	Uses spoon with good control Starting to use fork Can eat most meals independently
3-4 years	Can open food containers

# Tips to Promote Early Spoon Skills

- Use small, shallow, easy to grasp spoon
- Initially use foods that stick to the spoon (i.e., mashed potatoes, Greek yogurt)
- Have 2 spoons at each meal so that your baby can imitate what you do with your spoon
- Start with a wide, shallow bowl so that it is easy to target
- Incorporate spoon use into play activities (i.e., feeding dolls, scooping in sandbox etc.)

# Tips to Promote Early Fork Skills

- Use a fork with a short, thick handle
- Use easy to pierce, bite-size foods (i.e., chicken pieces, cantaloupe)
- Use a plate with curved, raised edges to help keep food on the plate
- Use a non-skid placemat
- Practice skills outside of the mealtime (i.e., spear playdoh or dry noodles, push LightBrite pieces into the grid)





# Tips to Promote Control with Cups

- Use small cups (i.e., medicine cup size or slightly bigger) so that it's easier for your child to hold and control
- Use a weighted or glass cup to give more feedback on how fast the arms and hands are moving
- Practice during bathtime!
- Practice pouring water from containers of different sizes, you may wish to do this in the bath or over a larger bin





# Tips to Promote Straw Drinking

- Try straw cups that allow you to squeeze liquid upward (i.e., honey bear cup, Rubbermaid flip straw cup) so that you can help them feel what's supposed to happen
- Use shorter straws
- Use straw cups with handles to allow for easy grasp
- Practice blowing bubbles – this uses the same muscles

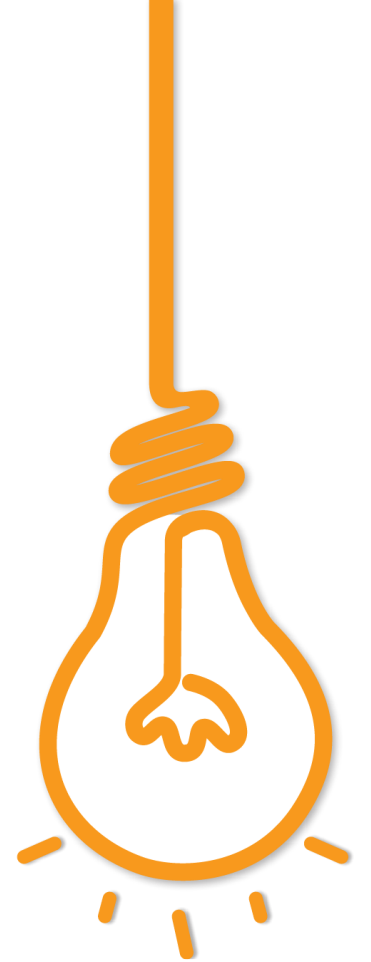
So, we're set up  
for the task...  
now what?



# Division of Responsibility

The **parent** is responsible for *what, when and where*.

The **child** is responsible for *how much and whether*.





# Tips for Picky Eating

- Between 2-6 years of age, picky eating is quite common!
- Picky eaters need opportunities for food exploration AND food exposure
- Anytime your child sees food, this is an ‘exposure’
- It may take up to 25 exposures before a child may be ready to try that food
- Serve meals ‘family style’ to increase exposure
- Talk more about what the food is like rather than why they should eat it
- If your child doesn’t want a new food on their plate, offer a small plate or bowl beside them so they can place it there
- If your child needs to remove food from their mouth, allow them to

## STEPS TO EATING

### EATING

- chews and swallows whole bolus independently
- chews, swallows whole bolus with drink
- chews, swallows some and spits some
- bites, chews "x" times & spits out
- bites pieces, holds in mouth for "x" seconds & spits out
- bites off piece & spits out immediately
- full tongue lick
- licks tips of teeth

### TASTE

- tip of tongue, top of tongue
- teeth
- lips
- nose, underneath nose
- chin, cheek
- top of head
- chest, neck
- arm, shoulder
- whole hand
- fingertips, fingerpads
- one finger tip

### TOUCH

- leans down or picks up to smell
- odor in child's forward space
- odor at table
- odor in room

### SMELLS

- uses utensils or container to serve self or to own plate/space
- uses utensils or a container to stir or pour food/drink outside of own space
- uses utensils or a container to stir or pour food/drink for others
- assists in preparation/set up with food

### INTERACTS WITH

- looks at food when directly in child's space
- being at the table with the food just outside of child's space
- being at the table with the food 1/2 way across the table
- being at the table with the food on the other side of the table
- being in the same room

### TOLERATES

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# Keep Mealtimes Fun!



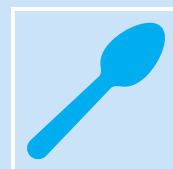
# Additional Ideas for Food Play



# Parents as Teachers and Partners



Take your child grocery shopping. Allow them to see and explore foods in every colour of the rainbow. Allow them to choose some of their favourite foods or a new food they'd like to try



Involve your child in meal preparation tasks. Have them drop foods into pots, get them to help stir or mix, or allow them to make decisions about the meal



Establish a routine, keep meal and snack times consistent

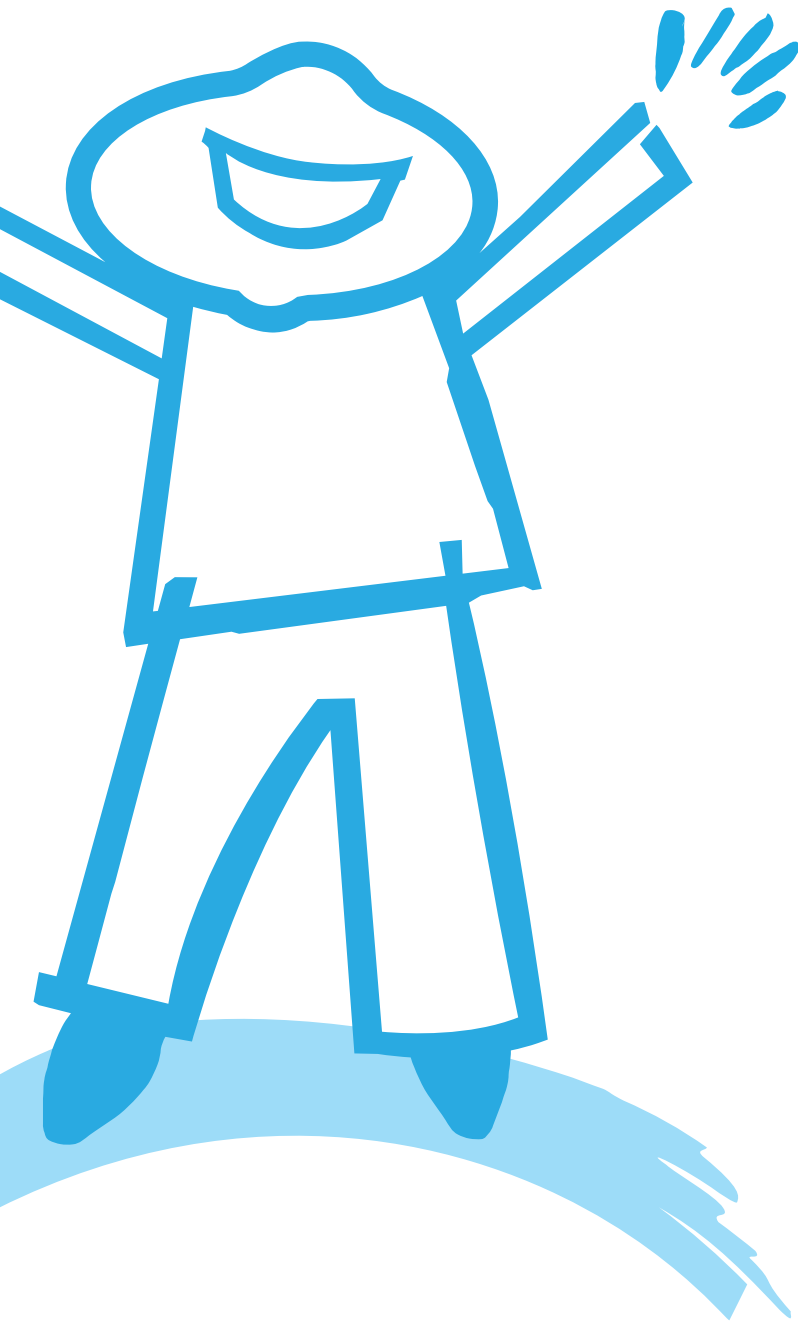


Eat together as a family whenever possible. Life is busy and it is hard to do, but even a couple family meals per week can make a big difference in how your child learns to interact with foods



# Role of an Occupational Therapist (OT)

- An OT can provide formal and/or informal assessment of your child's development.
- OTs have unique skills to help children acquire or progress their self-help skills, including their ability to dress themselves.
- Whether it's through direct learning or play, an OT can help kids learn to do the 'jobs' they need to do each day.



# To learn more about Grandview's Programs contact the Service Navigation Team

Call direct: 905-728-1673, ext. 2468

Email: [service.navigation@grandview.ca](mailto:service.navigation@grandview.ca)

Or visit our website [www.grandviewkids.ca](http://www.grandviewkids.ca)



Thank you!

# References

Overland, L. & Merkel-Walsh, R. (2013). Chapter 2: The Oral Phase of Feeding. In L. Overland & R. Merkel-Walsh, *A Sensory Motor Approach to Feeding*. (p.17-18 ).