



Survival of the Tastiest

**Helping Young Children with ASD
Who Have Eating Issues
Master Class with Dr. Rick**

**Richard Solomon MD
Medical Director
The PLAY Project**



Survival of the Tastiest Masterclass



- Welcome to the masterclass with Dr. Rick!
- Purpose of the masterclass
 - Discuss questions you have from the webinar
 - Talk about *your* child's eating issues
 - Discuss practical tips
 - Discussion welcome!
 - Use the chat
 - Just unmute and talk
 - Mute yourself if the room is noisy
 - Give others a chance to talk about their questions
- A few preliminary comments
 - Eating vs Feeding problems
 - Age considerations

Eating issues are much more common in ASD



- Atypical eating behaviors in ASD:
 - 5x more common than children with other disorders (e.g. ADHD, intellectual disability, language disorder, and learning disability)
 - 15x more common than their typical developing peers
- Areas of difference:
 - Limited food preferences (most common)
 - Texture sensitivity
 - Brand-specific preferences
- Like general population children, most feeding problems remitted over time,
 - small group of preschoolers with autism continued to show chronic feeding problems into school age

Baraskewich J, et al (2021) Feeding and eating problems in children and adolescents with autism: A scoping review. *Autism* Vol. 25(6) 1505–1519 DOI: 10.1177/1362361321995631

Eating issues are much more common in ASD



- Researchers found that food textures are the primary reason for food refusal in autistic youth. Specifically, smooth, creamy textures, foods that require chewing and food with lumps were identified as problematic
- Specifically, smoother, consistent textures (e.g. hotdogs) were more likely to be accepted than lumpy/inconsistent textures (e.g. pureed beans)
- Specific presentation of food was identified repeatedly as the most common eating ritual
- Pica more common

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Feeding vs eating problems



- Not address eating disorders
 - Anorexia Nervosa
 - Bulimia
 - True OCD
- These are serious medical conditions and need specialist
- Focus here is on younger children with autism up to adolescence
 - Picky eaters
 - Earlier intervention
 - Prevention of eating problems



Parents have a huge advantage... Hunger!

**Do you know what Martian children
with autism eat?**

Martian food!



Keeping the world the same



- Children with autism want to keep the world the same so. . .
- “A habit in motion stays in motion”
- Any pattern once established becomes a habit
- To break a habit
 - Be gradual
 - Be persistent
 - Be positive (use praise and rewards)
 - Explain why/exhort (if developmentally ready—see below)
 - Be ready for conflict
 - Believe in your child and give a message of competence

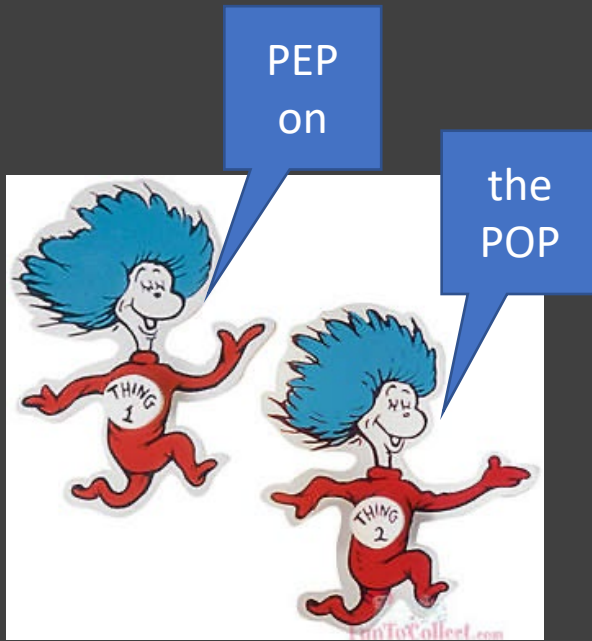
Developmental Considerations



- You cannot reason with children who have lower, functional developmental capacities
 - Though IQ not associated necessarily with eating problems (Mayes & Zickgraf, 2019)
- To understand your child's developmental capacities, answer these questions:
 - Can they follow 1 step spontaneous commands? Ex. 'Go get that car'
 - Can they answer simple 'wh'-type questions 'What', 'Where', 'Who'
 - Can they recall the immediate past: "What did you eat for lunch?"
 - Can they put two ideas together logically?
- To avoid your and your child's frustration, set expectations at the right developmental level
- Autism and ADHD: Makes eating issues more challenging



- The most common cause of 'picky eating' is. . . .
- **Poor Eating Practices** on the **Part of Parents** (aka: PEP on the POP)
- The most famous American Dietician—Ellyn Satter—says:



Family and Parenting: PEP on the POP

*“It’s the **parents’ job** to *put good food on the table.*”*

*It’s the **child’s job** to *eat.*”*

Message of Competence



- Very good parents hurt their children's feelings all the time by saying 'no' and by enforcing good rules
- When parents give in to their children's worst impulses because of 'tenderheartedness' they are giving a message that their child cannot tolerate frustration i.e. a message of incompetence
 - This is not conscious or intentional
- When parents expect children to follow rules and, in this case, eat good food, they give a message of competence
 - I believe in you, that you can eat good food

Make eating fun: But remember your huge advantage





10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater

1. Parents job to put good food on the table and the child's job to eat
 - Keep the plate out and let them come back when they are hungry or. . .
 - If the child won't eat the good food, offer them 1 (just one boring) alternate good food option like PB&J (i.e. Don't cook multiple meals)
2. Prevention: 'Survival of the Tastiest'. The single most important tip
 - Don't narrow food choices easily!
 - But do give children several choices so they can feel in control of their meals
3. PEP on the POP
 - If parents are fighting or anxious about eating, they are doing something wrong.
 - Watch out for FEAR and GUILT. Help parents have faith in their children's hunger
 - Behind every mother is a mother

10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater



4. If children have narrowed their diets, try: *Backward Chaining*:

- Reintroduce food they ate before
- 'Keep the World the Same': Keep all new foods 'similar but different' to old foods (crackers that are similar, etc.)
- Match foods by familiar color, texture & smell
- Mix the new food with a familiar and preferred food (but watch out if the child finds out you were 'tricking' them)

5. Make dinner time a fun family time

- If parents are fighting or anxious about eating, they are doing something wrong

10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater



5. Set up the sensory environment for success

- Visually: Use fun finger foods to entice children to eat veggies
- Desensitize (gradual and repeated daily exposures—it can take many exposures)
 - Simply *look* at the new food together
 - *Smell* it
 - *Touch* it / play with it (allowed!)
 - *Lick it once*
 - Then *tasting, just a bite*
 - *Consider a separate plate*
 - Small amounts are best



6. Make dinner time a fun family time

10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater





10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater

7. Talk to your child (if developmentally appropriate) about good food
 - Use a **social story** (Carol Gray)
 - **Use a fable** describing a favorite character like Barney or Spiderman eating this particular food
 - Use **modeling** (“Hey Mikey, he likes it!”)
 - Take a **video** of daddy, mommy, or sibling eating and enjoying it
8. Use a 5 Star reward system for tasting new foods
 - Just a tongue tip taste gets a star
 - 5 stars gets a prize
9. Use the food the child wants as a reward for trying something new.
 - If you try this, then you can have that (if/then)
 - And you will make mommy so happy (NO! The child should not eat to make you happy—this was a trick tip!)

10. Success!!





References & Resources

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Thank you!

Do You Have Any Questions?