

# Tips for Parents



Magu plant.  
Rhowch amser iddo.  
[llyw.cymru/rhowchamseriddo](http://llyw.cymru/rhowchamseriddo)

Parenting.  
Give it time.  
[gov.wales/giveittime](http://gov.wales/giveittime)

## Meal times

It isn't always easy to get the family to sit down to enjoy a meal together, but it is worth the effort. Sharing family meals gives everyone a chance to catch up and enjoy each other's company. Watching you and other family members eat a range of foods can encourage your child to try new foods.

It can be very frustrating when your child refuses to eat certain foods or refuses to eat at all. It's perfectly normal for toddlers to do this.

It is normal for children to be messy when they are learning to feed themselves. As they get older, their muscles and coordination will improve, and mealtimes will be less messy.

Children love to play with their food and this is one of the ways they learn. Letting young children play with their food – even if they make a mess – helps them to be better and healthier eaters when they're older.



## You can plan ahead by:

- **Eating with your child and sharing time together.**
- **Allowing your child to decide how much to eat.** Toddlers have small stomachs and can't eat much food at one time. Give them small portions and praise them for trying, even if they only manage a little. Offer healthy snacks between meals.
- **Offering your child a few different things on their plate to encourage them to eat.** Offer a variety of foods that include healthy portions.
- **Trying to avoid using food as a reward.**
- **Having meal times at a similar time every day.** Try to have meals before your child gets too hungry or too tired to eat.

- **Remembering that your child may not eat the same amount each time.** Just like you, some days your child will be hungry and other times they will be less hungry.
- **Involving your child in preparing the meal.** It's enjoyable for your child to do this with you and it may help them to try new foods.
- **Letting your child feed themselves.** Offer finger foods (cut food into strips or fingers) and let your child use their hands rather than a spoon or fork. In the early days of learning to eat, your child will find this easier to manage.
- **Letting older children serve themselves and give them limited choices** – “do you want broccoli or green beans?”.
- **Giving them the same food in a different way.** Your child may refuse cooked carrots but enjoy raw carrots cut into sticks.
- **Being positive and calm and praise them when trying new foods.** Ignore the fussing as much as you can. If you give your child lots of attention when they are fussy or refusing food, it may encourage them to keep behaving that way.
- **Avoiding distractions and making meal times a time together.** Try to switch off the TV and eat away from their toys or other distractions.
- **Putting a plastic mat under the highchair or have a cloth at the ready.** Spills happen and it is normal for children to be messy when they are learning to feed themselves.

There is more information about what to feed your child and ideas for meals on the Healthier Families website (<https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families>).

## Where to get advice and support

Universal parenting support and advice is provided by midwives, health visitors, GPs and your local authority. Early help programmes such as Flying Start (if you live in a Flying Start area) and Families First are also available.

Look after yourself. Meeting up with other parents can be great for your wellbeing. Your local **Family Information Service ([www.fis.wales](http://www.fis.wales))** will be able to tell you what's on in your area.

For positive parenting tips and expert advice, visit: [gov.wales/giveittime](http://gov.wales/giveittime)

