

# Dinnertime: Managing Fussy Eaters - Laminated Guide

## 1-2-3 Magic

PARENTING

### Dinnertime

#### Managing Fussy Eaters

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Quick  
Reference  
Guide



**H**ow many times have you read that dinnertime is supposed to be a wonderful occasion for togetherness and family bonding? Everyone sits at the table, enjoys one another's company, and shares humorous and engaging stories about their experiences during the day. The mood in the room is relaxed, warm, and affectionate.

If dinnertime at your house does not fit this picture, don't feel bad. You have lots and lots of company! The idea of dinnertime may be a nice one, but the reality is often much different. For one thing, parents are tired from working all day and the kids are tired from school. On top of that, with a little sibling rivalry, a freaky eater (or two), and kids who don't want to sit still at the table, and now you've got a recipe for a very challenging time of affairs.

**Picky Pete Who Would Not Eat**

**Mom:** "Come on, Pete, let's get going!"

**Pete:** "I'm not hungry."

**Dad:** "What did you have to eat after school?"

**Pete:** "Not that much."

**Mom:** "Then how come you're not eating?"

**Pete:** "I am eating! Why do I have to eat the stuff?"

**Dad:** "Vegetables are good for you."

**Pete:** "They taste like garbage."

**Dad:** "That's no way to talk about your mother's cooking! Oh, if you want, we can just sit here for the rest of the evening and your plate is clean."

**This unfortunate scene is repeated in millions of homes every night.** What is supposed to be a pleasant repast—the evening meal—turns into a nightmare. Other meals, like breakfast and lunch, can be similarly affected when mom and dad don't have a good understanding of readiness and a relaxed, reasonable plan for dealing with them.



**Let's Get 4 Things Straight!**

A good plan for eating together starts with a grasp of what eating and readiness are all about. There are four main points that need to be understood:

- 1. Don't take it personally!** You ate for the food you prepared, and your children don't care for what you cook up on a particular night. That should NOT be seen as a personal rejection of you.
- 2. Kids have a natural ability to select and eat good things.** However, this includes a strong tendency in preschoolers to be finicky. As many as 40% or more of this group are described by their parents as fussy eaters. Children will graduate to sweet and salt, but not bitter and sour. Those foods have to be more accepted over time.
- 3. Because of their fussiness about food, toddlers and preschoolers need to be gradually introduced—but not forced to eat—new foods.** Some experts say that for foods like vegetables it may take as many as 10–20 exposures before a child will actually eat something they are not familiar with.
- 4. Little kids are not particularly good at sitting at the table, but they will do this more easily when they are hungry.** When they are full, however, the **Three Minutes-Per-Year Rule** kicks in. Not hungry 180-year-olds, for example, can sit still for 3 minutes, not hungry 3-year-olds for 3 minutes. Expecting more will get you in trouble!



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