

# Talking During Mealtime

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In many households, the most social event of the day is mealtime. With family members talking together, your child is given a fun opportunity to learn and use language. At mealtime, your child can practice listening to others, describing events, and sharing feelings and information. Here are some tips to make the most out of "table talk"!

## What's special about mealtime?

The verbal give-and-take that occurs at the table is an ideal setting for a child to learn the rules of conversation. These rules involve what to say, how to say it, and when to say it. Other language skills develop at mealtime. "Gimme potatoes" gradually becomes "Please pass the potatoes." The use of polite language forms can be practiced while your child learns table manners. This is a first step toward the later ability to use appropriate language in different social situations. You can make the most of the daily mealtime routines to stimulate language development.

## Mealtime Concepts

Language is based on ideas and experiences. Through interaction with their world, children learn meaning. Here are some ideas or concepts that are a natural part of the mealtime routine. Help your child learn these concepts by talking about them at mealtime.

### Nouns:

Names of food and food groups, dishes, utensils, furniture, napkin, placemat, tablecloth, etc.

### Actions:

Eat, drink, taste, chew, swallow, cut, pour.

### Opposites:

Hot/cold, sweet/sour, more/less, empty/full, all/none, half/whole, a little/a lot, yummy/yucky, raw/cooked, liquid/solid, etc.

### Adjectives:

Colors and shapes of foods; crunchy, mushy, soupy, baked, fried, mashed, salty, messy, hungry, thirsty, full, all gone, more, etc.

### Location:

On the table, next to the plate, in the bowl, out of your chair, under the table, behind, away from, etc.

## Sample statements to use at mealtime:

Mealtime concepts can be practiced in unlimited ways. Here are some examples of statements that are tailored to children in: (1) the early stages, and (2) the later stages of language development. Use statements like these to encourage language development at mealtime.

Purpose	Examples	Concepts
Naming	(1) "Mmmmm, jello." (2) "This is called Crunchy Tuna Casserole."	Nouns
Describing	(1) "This looks good." "The peas are green and round."	Adjectives
Explaining	(1) "You dropped your cookie. It broke!" (2) "First eat the chicken and potatoes. Then you can have dessert."	Actions
Comparing	(1) "Juice is cold. Soup is hot." (2) "Oranges are much sweeter than grapefruit."	Adjectives
Requesting	(1) "More milk?" (2) "Would you like me to cut your meat for you?"	Vocabulary Actions
Giving directions	(1) "Stay in your chair." (2) "Please put your dirty glass on the counter."	Location
Predicting	(1) "You're going to like this apple." (2) "That's your third cupcake! How do you think you're going to feel after dinner?"	Nouns

With a little practice, mealtime can become a rewarding learning experience for your child.