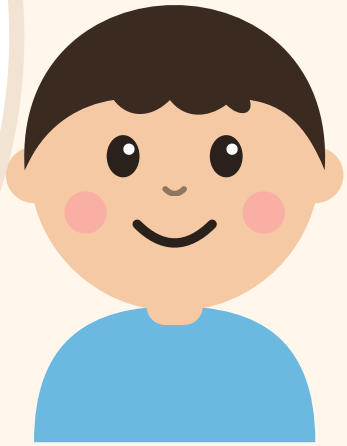
FREE PRINTABLE FOR PARENTS

Picky Eater Food Plan

A safe foods list, a try-a-new-food ladder and food chains

Gentle, no-pressure ways to widen what your child eats, one small step at a time. For fussy and picky eaters, including autistic, ADHD and PDA children.





Shall we look at the broccoli today?

How to use it, without pressure · **Safe foods list** · **Food ladder** · **Food chains** · **Maybe foods** · **Calm mealtimes plan** · **Card for school**

START HERE

How to use this, without pressure

Picky eating is rarely about being difficult. Many children find new foods genuinely hard: the smell, the texture, the not-knowing. Pressure usually makes that harder. These sheets help you **take the pressure off, keep safe foods safe, and let new foods become familiar slowly.**

Every step counts

Looking at a food, touching it or smelling it is real progress. Eating it is only the last step on the ladder.

Safe food on every plate

Always include at least one food your child reliably eats, so there is something they can say yes to.

No rewards or bribes for eating

"Eat this and you can have pudding" makes the new food the hard bit. Keep eating separate from treats.

One new thing at a time

A tiny amount, on a side plate if needed, next to familiar foods. Small changes are easier to say yes to.

Neutral words

No "good" or "bad" foods, no comments on how much they ate. "This is broccoli. It's crunchy" is plenty.

Let them stop

Your child can stop at any step, any time. Staying on a step for weeks is fine. Going back a step is fine too.

This is a practical tool, not medical advice or a treatment. If you're worried about your child's growth, weight or a shrinking range of foods, please speak to your GP or health visitor. There's more on the last page.

SHEET 1

Our safe foods

Foods your child reliably eats right now. Write how they like them, because brand, shape and temperature often matter. Keep this list safe: these foods are never "used up".

Meal	Safe foods	How they like it (brand, shape, served hot or cold, kept separate)
Breakfast		
Lunch		
Dinner		
Snacks		
Drinks		
Out and about		

Foods they used to eat and might come back to (no rush):

SHEET 2

Try-a-new-food ladder

2

Write up to four foods along the top. Tick each step when your child does it, **whenever they choose to**. There's no order you have to follow and no finishing line. Stopping on a step is fine.

Step	Food 1:	Food 2:	Food 3:	Food 4:
1. Be near it The food is on the table, or on someone else's plate	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Look at it It sits on their plate or a side plate. No need to touch	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Help with it Wash it, pour it, stir it, put it in a bowl	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Touch it With a finger, a fork or a cocktail stick	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Smell it Bring it close and have a sniff	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Kiss or lick it A quick touch with the lips or tongue	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Tiny taste A small bite they can spit into a napkin. That still counts	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Eat a little Chew and swallow a small amount, when they choose to	☐	☐	☐	☐

Many children need to meet a new food **lots of times** before they feel ready to taste it. Being near it, seeing it and touching it are all part of getting there.

SHEET 3

Food chains

3

Start with a safe food, then think of something **very similar**: a different brand, shape, flavour or way of cooking. Each link is a small change from the one before. Your child chooses whether to try the next link.

An example

Plain crackers (safe food)	Another brand of plain crackers	Crackers with a little butter	Crackers with cream cheese	Breadsticks

Our chains

Safe food:				
Safe food:				
Safe food:				
Safe food:				
Safe food:				

SHEET 4

Our maybe foods

4

Foods your child is **curious about**, or happy to have nearby. Let them choose what goes on this list. A maybe food is just a maybe: no promises, no pressure.

Maybe food	Who chose it	What we've done with it so far (seen it, helped cook it, smelled it…)

SHEET 5

Our calm mealtimes plan

5

Small changes to the setting can matter more than the food itself. Fill this in together if you can.

Where we eat, and where everyone sits:

What helps (a familiar plate, foods kept apart, small portions, a quiet room):

What makes it harder (strong smells, noise, being watched, being rushed):

The safe food that will always be on the plate:

Things the grown-ups will say (for example "you don’t have to eat it"):

Things we won’t say (comments on how much, "just one bite", good or bad food):

When the meal ends, and how:

SHEET 6

A card for school and carers

6

Fill this in and cut it out for school, nursery, a childminder or grandparents. Everyone using the same calm approach really helps.

About my child and food

Name:

Foods they reliably eat:

Foods that are a definite no (and why, if known):

What helps at mealtimes:

If they don't eat, please:

Allergies or medical needs:

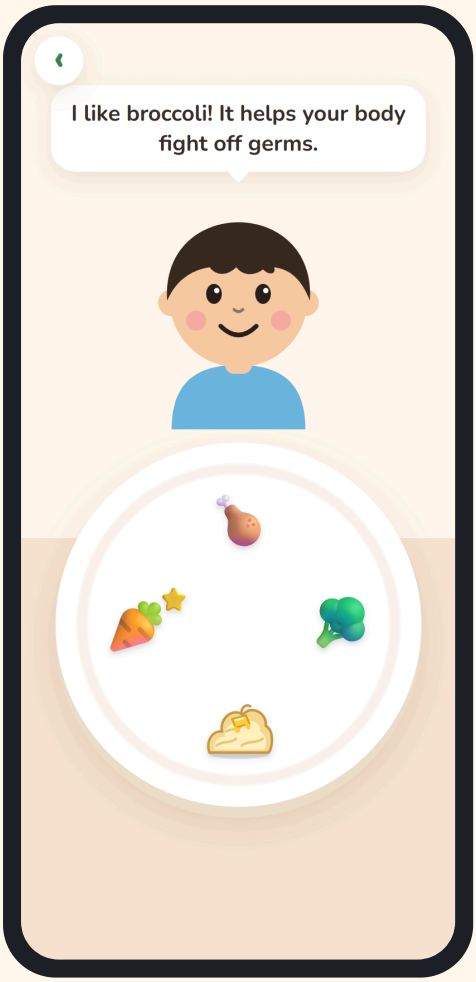
Please don't pressure, bribe or comment on how much they eat. Thank you!

OUR MEALTIME APP

Eat With Me

A gentle mealtime companion for picky eaters, built on the same ideas as this plan.

For the days when a screen at the table is the reality. You build tonight's plate, and your child eats alongside a friendly character who tries each food and shares a simple fact about it. New foods can be explored one small step at a time, with no pressure.



- **You choose the foods,** so your child only sees what's on their plate
- **A friend on screen eats with them** and says something true about each food
- **Maybe foods:** look, smell, touch, at your child's pace
- **No pressure, no rewards for eating** and no "bad food" words
- **Allergies set by you,** and those settings stay on your device
- **A gentle screen-off timer:** the friend says goodnight and dinner carries on
- **No adverts, no tracking**

Scan to start

Start your 14-day free trial at eatwithme.neurodivergentminds.com

Then £2.99 a month or £19.99 a year · cancel any time

BEFORE YOU GO

When to ask for help

Many children's eating is hard for years and slowly widens with time and low-pressure support. Sometimes it's worth getting help.

Worth mentioning to your GP, health visitor or school

Worry about your child's growth, energy or weight; a very small range of foods that is getting smaller; frequent gagging or vomiting with food; regular constipation or tummy problems; a child who is very tired or unwell; mealtimes causing real distress for the family.

Worth seeking help soon

A child who is losing weight, refusing most food or drink, showing signs of dehydration, or who is afraid of eating because of choking or vomiting. Please contact your GP promptly. A GP can look at the whole picture and refer to a dietitian or other specialist where it's appropriate.

This printable is general information, not medical advice, and it isn't a treatment for any condition. Every child is different. If something here doesn't feel right for your child, trust your judgement and ask a professional.

More from us: our free guide *Calmer Mealtimes With a Picky Eater* and our articles on fussy eating are at **neurodivergentminds.com/guides/picky-eating**.

© Neurodivergent Minds. Free to print and share for personal, family, school and nursery use. Please don't sell it.