

Ideas for Exploring Food Through Play

- Roll toy car through yogurt, pudding, different types of sauces. Ask child to “get the tires muddy.” After car is “muddy”, ask the child to “get the car washed” and model this by licking your toy car. The child could also dip the car in a glass of water at first if he/she is not ready yet to lick the car.
- Make kabobs using one of the child’s preferred foods and a new food. Have the child put the new food in the middle of the kabob and the preferred foods on the end. If he/she is not ready to eat the kabob yet, have them make a kabob for a family member.
- Use a lint roller to pick up raisins, peas, or corn. Then ask the child to pick them off, one by one. Model by eating the food off of your lint roller. If he/she is not ready to eat the food from the lint roller, discuss the properties of the food while they pick them off. Example: What does that smell like? What does it sound like when I drop it on the table? What color is it?
- Have the child use a cookie cutter in a fun shape to cut pancakes, peanut butter or grilled cheese sandwiches, or anything soft. Discuss the shape made with the child. Ask them if the new shape made the food taste different. This helps the child learn that foods still taste the same even if they look different.
- Have the child use cupcake sprinkles or food coloring to change the color of milk, mashed potatoes, or oatmeal. Let the child stir the sprinkles and the food. Discuss the new color. Have the child taste the food or touch or smell the food if not ready to taste. Again, this helps the child learn that foods still taste the same even if they look different.
- Offer a tiny portion of a new food but put in a tiny glass (such as a shot glass), on a small plastic lid, or bottle cap. The food seems less threatening if in its own container or in a very small portion. Discuss the properties of the food. Example: Does it make a noise when rolled around in the glass? What does it smell like? What does it feel like?
- Use fun, curvy straws to increase the acceptance of new beverages. Discuss how the liquid looks as it moves through the straw.
- Make a fruit or vegetable more friendly by having the child put potato head parts on the food. The food seems less threatening with a friendly face.
- Have the child make a food necklace by using pasta or licorice as the string and cheerios or apples (cored) cut horizontally as the pieces to add to the necklace. Discuss the food properties as you make the necklace. Example: What does it feel like? What does it smell like?

Try these strategies at a scheduled snack time. If the child refuses to participate, try again the next day. Remember the emphasis is on exploring the food, not necessarily eating it. If the child tries a new food during the play, give him/her lots of praise and ask them how it tasted (refrain from asking “did you like it?” as you may get a “no!” response immediately).