

EATING HIERARCHY

EDUCATIONAL HANDOUT

FuntasticOTTools.com

Children who are picky eaters or problem feeders often have trouble trying new foods. This can be due to issues with sight, taste, texture, smell, and temperature. Occupational therapists use a technique called the Eating Hierarchy to help children become more comfortable with unfamiliar foods and reduce anxiety. This method involves a series of steps that aim to expand children's food preferences and enable them to enjoy a wider range of options.

1

Tolerate

- Look at food placed in front of child.
- Tolerating the following: food directly in front of the child, halfway across the table, other side of the table, or in the same room as the child.

2

Interact

- Use eating utensils and containers to play with the food, such as by stirring, mixing, or pouring for themselves or others.
- Assist with preparing or setting up food, such mixing the food for meal prep or putting food onto other's plate/bowl.

3

Smell

- Lean down to smell the food.
- Bring food close to nose with fingers or eating utensils to smell.
- Tolerate the smell of the food that is placed in front of them, on the table, or in the room.

4

Touch

- Touching food with the following: fingers, hand, arm, shoulder, chest, neck, chin, cheek, under the nose, teeth.

5

Kiss

- Touching or kissing food with lips.

6

Lick

- Full tongue lick with the food.
- Lick lips or teeth.

7

Bite

- Bite off a piece of food then spit out.
- Bite food, hold in mouth for a few seconds, and spit out.
- Bite food, chew for a few times, and spit out.

8

Bite & Swallow

- Chew and swallow food with a drink.
- Chew and swallow food.

References:

- Morris, S. E., Klein, M. D., & Satter, E. (2000). *Pre-feeding skills: A comprehensive resource for mealtime development* (2nd ed.). Austin: Pro-Ed.
- Tanner, A., & Andreone, B. E. (2015). Using graduated exposure and differential reinforcement to increase food repertoire in a child with autism. *Behavioral Analysis Practice*, 8(2), 233-240. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-015-0077-9>
- Toomey, K., & Ross, E. (2011). SOS approach to feeding. *Perspectives on Swallowing and Swallowing Disorders (Dysphagia)*, 20(3), 82. <https://doi.org/10.1044/sas20.3.82>