

## Strategies for challenges relating to food

### Before coming to table

- Heavy work (carrying, pushing) and firm bear hugs – see body awareness activity sheet for further ideas
- Help with preparing food
- Help setting the table
- Turn off the television and any other distractions



### At the table



- Before eating, help your child to prepare for the meal by squashing their cheeks, apply pressure on the jaw and lips, pull cheeks to make funny faces.
- Hold a vibrating toy or electric toothbrush against the outside of the mouth and cheeks
- Sit on a suitable chair (angle of hips, knees, ankles and elbows should be at 90°); ensure your child's chair is at a good height and their feet are supported.
- Also ensure their elbows are resting comfortably, allowing easy forearm movement across the table surface.
- Encourage your child to do chair push-ups – putting hands on the sides of the chair and lifting their bottoms of the chair (see picture to the right)
- Reduce distraction in the eating area - encourage your child with prompts and praise.
- Encourage your child to feed themselves – fingers or cutlery. Provide hand-over-hand assistance if needed.
- Ensure child is using suitable cutlery and plate/bowl – see online self-care section for further advice if required.
- Serve small portions so as not to overwhelm the child



### Behaviour strategies

- Visual support system – mealtime routine and order in which to eat
- Reward system/sticker chart
- Offer them an element of choice e.g. sweetcorn or peas
- Provide the same meal for all at the table
- Model good behaviour e.g. using cutlery, not playing, not using an electronic device
- Try having a shared plate e.g. vegetables, side dishes and main course in the middle of the table, and everyone demonstrating helping themselves.

### **Additional strategies for children who over-fill their mouth:**



- Before eating, encourage child to play games that require them to push their tongue in to the inside of their cheek e.g. poking inside of cheek with tongue, and pushing back in with finger
- Blow up cheeks with air and squash with hands
- Use a mirror for the child to see how full their mouth or cheeks are
- Restrict portion size
- Re-enforcing the need to swallow before they put the next mouthful in
- Demonstrate the ideal quantity that needs to go on each spoonful/forkful

### **Additional strategies for children who are over sensitive to food texture/smell/taste:**

- Allow children to smell and explore food texture with their hands as this is an important preparation for accepting the food in their mouth.
- If diet is restricted, start by introducing variations on the foods they already tolerate i.e. different brands of same foods or food with a similar texture or taste
- Plate with compartments / have a shared plate with an adult in order to help decrease the pressure
- Positive interaction between the child and adult will help to develop the child's confidence – keep pressure low especially when trying new foods.
- Reward/sticker charts for trying new foods or finishing what's on their plate.