

SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS WITH A PICKY EATER

Halloween – Thanksgiving – Christmas - Kwanza –Yom Kippur – Valentine’s – Easter

What makes the Holidays so difficult for the Picky Eater (or Problem Feeder)?

- * **Holidays are about eating specific, traditional foods** (some of which our children may not every see any other time of the year)
- * **Holidays are about sweets** (which suppress appetite faster than any other food)
- * **Holidays are about lots of people** (who our children may or may not know)
- * **Holidays are about family members who have certain expectations about how our children should behave**
- * **Holiday Food = LOVE** (so if you don’t eat grand mom’s special cranberry sauce, you are being? unloving? ?disrespectful?, ?not a family member?)
- * **Holidays are about fun, excitement, anticipation and noise, all of which may be disorganizing for our child**
- * **Holidays are about being allowed to be off my normal schedule** – also often disorganizing
- * **Holidays frequently include traveling and not being in my usual safe environment** (picky eaters may not travel well, and problem feeders usually don’t travel well)

4 Main Holiday Helping Strategies:

1. = Minimize and Limit the Changes
2. = Prepare your Child in Advance
3. = Feed your Child BEFORE the Major Holiday Meal/Event
4. = Control and Limit the Sweets

HALLOWEEN (and Valentine’s Day)

#1 = Minimize/Limit changes:

1. At Halloween/, limit the number of Halloween parties and events they will attend based on your child’s age
 - Preschoolers = to only Halloween night, and only one family activity beyond Trick or Treating
 - Kindergarten – 2nd grade = they will have a school event. This is enough in addition to Trick or Treating or a Halloween party IF there is no Trick or Treating
2. At Valentine’s Day, limit the number of parties they will attend based on your child’s age
 - Preschoolers = to only Valentine’s Day
 - Kindergarten – 2nd grade = they will have a school event. This is enough in addition to one thing that the family might do

#2 = PREPARE your Child in Advance

1. at least 2-4 weeks before Halloween, discuss what the plans are going to be (Valentine's Day – will need to discuss the cards, especially if in school)
2. Prepare you Preschooler through 1st grader that people dress up for Halloween but they are costumes and NOT REAL
3. Practice “dressing up” – in non-Halloween costumes
4. Give your child a simple explanation about what Halloween is that fits with your family's beliefs
5. Don't let your Preschooler through kindergartener answer the door at Halloween

#3 = Feed Your Child BEFORE

1. Offer them a simple Meal or Snack of preferred foods (make sure their school lunch or snack given before the Valentine's Day or Halloween Party is really easy to eat)
2. Make sure this meal/snack is heavy on the Proteins. But, don't forget to still offer a balanced meal/snack which includes at least: 1-2 Proteins; 1 Starch; 1 Fruit or Vegetable and their milk.
3. Making them eat challenging foods may spark power struggles in a child who may already be over-excited and not able to handle increased eating demands
4. Don't make participating in the Halloween or Valentine's event contingent on what they eat

#4 = Limit the Sweets

1. Allowing free access to sweets suppresses the appetite for more nutritious foods and can lead to craving more sugary foods
2. One small “Sweet Treat” a day for no more than one week after Halloween or Valentine's Day is sufficient to celebrate this Holiday.
3. Tie how many days in a row they will get a “Sweet treat” to their age. IE. If they are 3, they will get one “Sweet treat” once a day for 3 days in a row.
4. Have your child pick out which treats they want for their # of days and put those in a special place.
5. Do **NOT** make whether they get their “Sweet treat” contingent on their eating. Pick a meal, after which they automatically get their treat.
6. The rest of the Halloween candy goes up out of their reach for “later” (and thrown out before the December holidays)
7. Make sure children know they need to ask first before taking a “Sweet treat”.
8. If they eat all of their selected “Sweet treats” early, they get no more as a consequence.

THANKSGIVING AND DECEMBER HOLIDAYS/Easter

#1 = Minimize/Limit changes:

- 1) At Thanksgiving, and during the December and Easter Holidays, try to keep your child on their usual eating schedule, even if this means that they will be eating off-schedule of the main Holiday meal
 - Don't make them wait for food until the main Holiday meal. This will just make them cranky.
 - When it is their usual time for them to eat on the Holiday day, offer more “safe” preferred foods.

- 2) Try to include into the main Holiday meal, at least one food you are pretty sure your child will eat that still fits the Holiday theme.
 - So you may have apple slices in addition to cranberry sauce.
 - Many children will eat some type of bread
- 3) Have them sit with the rest of the family at the main meal, but don't expect them to eat a lot. (It's also okay if they do eat a bit more.)
- 4) IF you are Traveling – try to stay on your own time zone if you will be out of town less than 3 days (sleeping & eating)
 - If you will be gone longer than 3 days, try to shift their schedule only one hour at a time. Do each shift for at least 2 days before shifting again.
 - Bring as many familiar eating utensils, plates, cups, placemats etc. as possible
 - On the days that are not the actual special Holiday day, keep your usual expectations and routines for meals the same (have your family members do your routine with you)

#2 = PREPARE your Child in Advance

- 1) Begin talking to them about the trip 2-4 weeks in advance. Show them pictures of the relatives they may be meeting.
- 2) Tell them what activities you are going to be doing on which day. Drawing pictures of what you are going to do can be helpful for younger children.
- 3) Talk to them about their goal at the main Holiday meal is going to be to work on their Manners.
- 4) Practice cooking and serving some of the typical, special Holiday foods that your family has AT HOME BEFORE the trip

#3 = Feed Your Child BEFORE

- 1) Offer them a simple Meal or Snack of preferred foods.
- 2) Make sure this meal/snack is heavy on the Proteins. But, don't forget to still offer a balanced meal/snack which includes at least: 1-2 Proteins; 1 Starch; 1 Fruit or Vegetable and their milk.
- 3) Making them eat challenging foods may spark power struggles in a child who may already be over-excited and not able to handle increased eating demands
- 4) Don't make their participation in the Holiday event(s) contingent on what they eat

#4 = Limit the Sweets

- 1) Allowing free access to sweets suppresses the appetite for more nutritious foods and can lead to craving more sugary foods
- 2) One small "Sweet Treat" a day for no more than one week after or as a part of the Holiday is sufficient.
- 3) Again, tie how many days in a row they will get a "Sweet treat" to their age. IE. If they are 3, they will get one "Sweet treat" once a day for 3 days in a row.
- 4) Do **NOT** make whether they get their "Sweet treat" contingent on their eating. Pick a meal, after which they automatically get their treat.
- 5) Make sure children know they need to ask first before taking a "Sweet treat".