



Quick Wins at Mealtimes

A simple guide for smoother meals and calmer classrooms

Post this near your food center or snack station!

- ✓ Is everyone seated with support (hips, knees, feet)?
- ✓ Are the lights/music/noise calm?
- ✓ Are utensils, napkins, and tools available for self-feeding?
- ✓ Have children washed hands and transitioned from play?
- ✓ Is a calming routine or song being used before starting?

Before The Meal

DURING THE MEAL:

Need more ideas or stuck on a specific challenge?



SCAN HERE

If You See...	Try This...
Child is anxious or won't come to the table	Avoid forcing, but keep the expectation of sitting. Try: "You can choose to sit with your food or just sit and watch for now."
Child gags or chokes often	Offer smaller bites, soft textures, and allow spitting if needed. Flag for referral. Remind them to bite on the side
Child refuses everything but one food	Allow their preferred food and put a second food on the plate with no pressure to eat but model the next step.
Child is overwhelmed by noise/chaos	Lower background noise and dim lights if possible. Space chairs a bit, keep groups smaller when you can, or seat near quieter peers.
Child keeps leaving the table, standing up during meals, or is wiggly	Check if they have foot support and core stability. Add a bin or box if needed.

After the Meal:

- ✓ Invite children to clear their own plates or cups
- ✓ Praise calm participation, not clean plates
- ✓ Offer a quiet transition activity like a book, song, or sensory bin