

Mealtime Moves and Countermoves

Even if your child agrees to the rules ahead of time, he will experiment to be sure the rules are really the rules. Your reaction can pull you into being controlling: into trying to do his part with the division of responsibility. At that point,

your child is likely to become contrary and eat poorly. This table gives some ideas for how to stick to the division of responsibility in response to your child's experiments.



Your CHILD'S Move	YOUR Move
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He says, "I am not hungry."	You say, "You do not have to eat; just sit with us for a while."
She is too worked up and busy to eat.	Spend a few minutes with her just before the meal reading a book or washing hands. Set a 5-minute timer.
He cannot take time to eat.	Arrange for him to be hungry by not letting him eat between times.
She is too hungry to wait for meals.	Have sit-down snacks between meals.
He is messy. He drops, throws, or smears food for fun or to get a rise out of you.	Give him one warning, then have him leave the meal. Don't let him come back.
She does not want to stay at the meal until you finish eating.	Let her leave when she gets full. She will stay at the table longer as she gets older and learns to enjoy conversation.
He is naughty or otherwise disruptive at the meal.	Have him leave. He is full or he would eat—and behave!
She comes back right after the meal, begging for a food handout.	Don't give her food until snack time. Ignore any tantrums. Give her a time-out if she persists.
He gets down, but wants your attention, to sit on your lap, to eat off your plate.	Pat him on the head and send him away. Teach him to play quietly while you eat.
She does not eat "enough" at mealtime.	Only she knows how much is enough. Don't let her eat or drink, except for water. Plan a snack for a set time and stick to it.
He says, "Can I get the peanut butter? I can put peanut butter on my bread."	You say, "No, that is like making a separate meal. You do not have to eat anything if you do not want to, but you do have to settle for this meal."
"Why or why not?"	"Because those are the rules."

For more about the division of responsibility, see Elynn Satter's *Feeding with Love and Good Sense: 18 months through 6 years*, Kelsey Press, 2014. See www.ElynnSatterInstitute.org to review other resources. ©2014 by Elynn Satter. You may reproduce this article if you don't charge for it or change the content and if you include the "for more about" and "copyright" statements. Please email notifications@elynnSatterInstitute.org about how and where you use it (include a link if applicable).



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