

## **STEPS TO EATING FOR PROFESSIONALS**

### **General Tips**

#### **There are six major “Steps to Eating.”**

1. The child is able to **TOLERATE THE PHYSICAL PRESENCE/ SIGHT** of the food (i.e. Will be in the same room as the food or at the same table as the food)
2. The child is able to **INTERACT WITH THE FOOD** (i.e. Uses a napkin or other food to touch the target food) **WITHOUT** directly touching the food to their skin
3. The child is able to **TOLERATE THE SMELL OR ODOR** of the food
4. The child is able to **TOUCH THE FOOD TO HIS/HER SKIN** (i.e. Tolerates the food touching a body part, including fingers, hands, face -- the closer the physical proximity to the mouth, the more threatening)
5. The child is able to **TASTE THE FOOD** (i.e. an action which results in the child getting a taste of the food **AND** processing the taste of that food)
6. The child is able to **CHEW AND SWALLOW THE FOOD**, or at least some part of the food

**Each of the six major steps is composed of several sub-steps**, which will vary from child to child (See the **STEPS TO EATING** handout). In general, there are 32 usual Steps which children with feeding difficulties will progress through. **These steps are progressive**, such that the child usually will first master step 1 before he/she masters step 2, etc. However, a child does not necessarily need to complete every one of the Steps. He/She may skip some of the smaller, 32 Steps **AND/OR** a child may have more, smaller Steps in between each of the usual 32 Steps.

- Tailor your modeling along the hierarchy to the tolerance of this particular child
- Make sure that you are not starting at a step that is too high for this child
- Make sure that steps between foods are small enough for this child to tolerate
- If the child does not follow you up the Steps To Eating, it means that you have jumped too far. Just back up, and start with a lower step (or sub-step).
- Many times children will not feel safe to put a food into their mouths unless they know they have permission to spit it out if they cannot handle it. Often we have to teach children to move a food forward in their mouths in order to spit it out first, before they can learn to move it back for a swallow.

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### **Introducing Starches Example**

#### **STEP 1: TOLERATES FOOD**

- Twirl the pretzel around on the table about 12 inches away from the child. Say, "Look, we can make our pretzel rod go in a circle like this!"
- Roll the rod across the table just outside of the child's space
- Next, twirl the pretzel rod directly in front of the child.

#### **STEP 2: INTERACTS WITH FOOD/ SMELLS FOOD/ TOUCHES FOOD**

- Make the rod into a train and use another food to push the rod along
- Play peek-a-boo under the napkin with the child helping to lift the napkin up and down (will also release the smell)
- Hold pretzel rod out to child and say "you can smell my flower rod"
- Crunch the pretzel rod with one finger or smash it with your whole hand.
- Use the pretzel rod as a drumstick on the table.
- Use the pretzel rod as a paintbrush to make a picture on the table. Use a food puree as the "paint."
- Snap the pretzel rod into smaller pieces. Say, "I'm going to make a smaller paintbrush."
- Roll the pretzel rod across the back of one hand using the other hand.
- Roll or "drive" the pretzel rod up your arm and sit it in your shoulder. Say, "Look! I can drive my train up the railroad tracks to the station."
- Make the rod jump to your head
- Then pretend to sneeze so it rolls across your head down onto the table.
- Roll the rod from the top of your head down onto the table.
- Roll the rod from the top of your head down your forehead and off your nose.
- If the child has glasses, have the child balance the rod on the edge of his/her glasses.
- Give the pretzel rod a hug to your cheek.
- Use the pretzel rod to make a mustache or whiskers by placing it just under your nose (Some children need to make a beard or necklace first).
- Give the pretzel rod a kiss and then set it down.
- Paint your lips using the pretzel rod dipped in a "safe" puree.

#### **STEP 5: TASTING THE FOOD**

- Hold the pretzel rod in your lips and act like a dog with a bone.
- Hold the pretzel rod perpendicular in your lips and blow it like a horn.
- Hold two small pieces of the rod vertical in your lips like walrus tusks.
- Hold the rod in your teeth with no hands.
- Hold the pretzel rod in your teeth and have the child grab one end of your "bone." Have them try to pull it out of your mouth while you grip it with your teeth. Then, you try to grab theirs and pull on it.
- Lick the pretzel rod like a lollipop.
- Roll the rod across your tongue.
- "Brush your teeth" with the pretzel rod.

- Break the rod into smaller pieces and hold them in your teeth/ lips and blow them into a cup to make baskets.
- Scrape the salt with the edges of your front teeth.
- Smash the pretzel rod into a powder with your finger. Then lick your finger, dip it in the pretzel powder, and lick it off. (This is a great one to use to talk about the process of chewing and swallowing. “Look. I can make this pretzel rod into pretzel powder with my finger. This is what my teeth do to the pretzel in my mouth. Then I can touch the powder. It is soft. When I lick my finger and dip it into the powder, it sticks. Now if I rub the powder on my tongue it melts into pretzel water. The spit on my tongue helps that powder turn into pretzel water so I can swallow it down.”)
- Hold rod in your mouth like a popsicle.
- Break off a small piece of the pretzel rod and place it directly onto the back molars and crunch it loudly.
- Loudly bite off a piece of the pretzel rod with your front teeth. Use your tongue to move the piece to your molars and chew. Use exaggerated movements and running verbal commentary to narrate the steps of your chew as you are moving through them.
- Chew pretzel bites with an exaggerated up-and-down head movement. You can also put one hand on top of your head and one hand below your chin to accentuate this motion.
- Chew bites loudly and in exaggerated fashion as described above. Tip your head back to demonstrate to the child how he/she can demonstrate how to help the food move back in his/her throat for a (passive) swallow.
- After chewing your food, show the child how your food turns to “(name of food) water.” Show him/her how you can now swallow this liquidity mixture down to your tummy (use your hand to trace the trajectory of the food from our throats to our stomach). Sometimes it helps if you have the child put his/her hand on your jaw and/or throat to feel the chewing and swallowing motions. If he/she feels comfortable with you touching his/her face, put your hand on the child’s jaw/ throat so he/she can try these chewing and swallowing motions.

### **INTRODUCING CHEWY/RUBBERY/HARD TEXTURES**

The steps you would take with these foods are very similar to the steps described for introducing starches. The main difference is that these foods don’t “crunch” when you press down on them with your fingers.

#### For chewy/rubbery textures...

- You will need to tear these foods instead of snapping or crunching them.
- Instead of crunching them into powder, you can push on them and smash them, or point out that nothing happens when you push on them.

#### For very hard textures (e.g. Nuts)...

- You can get a mini-chopper and use the mini chopper to demonstrate what happens to that food in the mouth.

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### INTRODUCING PUREES EXAMPLE

#### STEPS 1-2: TOLERATES FOOD/ INTERACTS WITH FOOD

- The group leader introduces the puree in a **plain and clear** container or plastic baggie.
- It can be served by pouring it out of this container, or by using a serving spoon (to be used exclusively for serving, not for eating), or by squeezing the baggie.
- Have the child assist in pouring the puree onto his/her plate or onto the table directly in front of the child.
- If the child will not assist with the pouring/squeezing or cannot tolerate having the puree directly in front of him/her, you can pour a small bit of the puree on the table an arm's length away from the child.
- If the child cannot tolerate the puree at an arm's length, cover the puree with a napkin. Later, after the child settles down and appears ready for a second try, the covering can be removed.
- You can use a harder texture (preferably a Hard Munchable) to stir the puree.
- You can use a hard texture to paint on the table with the puree (children can later be encouraged to lick their paintbrush).

#### STEP 3: SMELLING THE FOOD

- Wave the container without the lid, or fan the lid over the open container towards the child, or open the baggie under their nose.
- You can lean down close to the puree to smell it or blow on it on a plate.

#### STEP 4: TOUCHING THE FOOD

- Have the child "paint" his/her fingernails with the puree
- Encourage the child to use his/her finger to draw pictures/letters/numbers/favorite cartoon characters in the puree
- Have the child make a full hand print in the puree
- Have the child make dots up and down his/her arms with the puree
- Make tattoos on everyone's arms
- If the child wears glasses, have the child paint "eyeballs" on his/her glasses.
- Have the child put the puree on his/her face. Draw bindis, clown noses, mustaches, beards. Pretend to put on make-up (e.g. blush or rouge), or to shave with the puree as the shaving cream.
- Put puree "lipstick" or "chapstick" on our lips

#### STEP 5: TASTING THE FOOD

- Encourage the child to use his/her finger to put a tiny dab of the puree on his/her tongue or teeth, or have him/her lean down and touch the puree with his/her tongue.
- Have the child lick the puree off of the table like a dog or cat or have the child lick the puree off his/her fingers.