Mealtime Conversation Cards for Toddlers & Preschoolers

A Tool for Parents and Caregivers

Let’s Talk...

Explore the 5 Senses at the Table

- **Sight**: What colour is it? What shape is it?
- **Sound**: What sound does it make? Is it loud, crunchy, slurpy, etc.?
- **Taste**: Is it sweet, spicy, sour or salty?
- **Touch**: Is it soft, hard, squishy, cold, etc.?
- **Smell**: Do you know this smell? Does it smell yummy, sweet, fishy, burnt, etc.?

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Let’s Talk...

Mystery Food

Close your eyes.

Can you smell it, touch it or taste it?
Let’s Talk...  

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Eating together has many benefits for kids and families.

Use the Let’s Talk... cards to enjoy more meaningful, mealtime conversation with your child.

Here’s how:

1. Choose a card.
2. Read the card out loud.
3. Get talking!

Let your child lead the way!

Let’s Talk...

Enjoy at least one meal or snack with your child each day.

When kids eat meals or snacks with an adult, they:

- Are healthier
- Eat better
- Have better language skills
- Have better behaviour
- Are more connected with others.

Let’s Talk...

Other Ideas

- Practice using numbers and letters. Examples: “A is for apple, B is for bread…”
- Ask your child to name and describe foods on the table.
- Talk to your child about where does this food come from or how it was made.
- Make up a song or story using the foods on the table.
- Make up fun names for your meals like “ants on a log”, “toad in the hole” or “sunshine toast”.

Let’s Talk...
Let’s Talk…

Breakfast

What is your favourite breakfast food?

When I was a child, my favorite breakfast was…?

(Tell a story)

Let’s Talk…

Spoon

What is this called?

What is it made from?

(wood, plastic, metal, etc.)

Let’s Talk…

Cheese

What is cheese made from?

What other foods are made from milk?

Let’s Talk…

Picnics

Where do you like to go on a picnic?

What would you like to bring on a picnic?
Kids who eat breakfast are healthier and do better at school.

Kids are more likely to eat breakfast when parents eat breakfast with them.

Let’s Talk...

Children and parents share the responsibility of eating.

The parent's role is to offer 3 meals and 2-3 snacks each day.

The child's roles are to decide whether to eat and how much to eat.

Never force a child to eat.

Let’s Talk...

Share stories and memories with your children.

When adults share stories with their children, families come together and children learn how to tell stories too.

Let’s Talk...

Teeth are strongest 18 months after they appear in the mouth.

Brushing with fluoride toothpaste helps keep teeth strong and protects them from cavities.
**Let’s Talk…**

**Yogurt**

Do you eat yogurt with a spoon or fork?

What are some foods you can add to yogurt?

**Tomatoes**

Tomatoes have a smooth skin with a juicy flesh.

What colour are they?

Do you like the little ones or the big ones?

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**Let’s Talk…**

**Watermelon**

What colour is the inside? *(Yes, its red with white seeds.)*

**Raisins**

What fruit is used to make raisins?

Let’s count them! *(1, 2, 3…)*
If your child will not eat what is served, and asks you to make something else…

Tell your child that you hope he finds something to eat from the foods on the table.

Don’t force or coax him to eat.

Offer a healthy snack in two to three hours.

Toddlers communicate with body language and words.

Parents should provide a variety of foods and let the child decide whether to eat and how much to eat.

Foods that are sticky or sweet increase the risk of cavities.

Frequent eating or drinking of these foods increases the time that they are in contact with your child’s teeth.

Limit sticky or sweet foods to meal or snack times only.

Children learn new words when they hear adults use them at least 3 times.

To help build your child’s language skills, use the “match + one” method (like the example on the front of this card).

When your child makes a comment, repeat what she has said and add a new word or idea to it.
Let’s Talk...

Peach

How does a peach feel? (rough, smooth, fuzzy, etc.)

Let’s Talk...

Apple

How does an apple feel in your mouth? (chewy, hard, bumpy, etc.)

Do you like red, green or yellow apples?

Let’s Talk...

Celery

What is the texture of celery? (crunchy, stringy, etc.)

Do you like celery cooked or raw?

Have you heard the snack called “ants on a log”?

Let’s Talk...

Salad

How do you mix a salad? (This way! Make a mixing motion.)

Let’s name all the vegetables in the salad.

What other things can we put in a salad?
Let’s Talk...

Toddlers rely on their parents to teach them new words.

Children understand words before they can say them.

Talk and sing to your child. Listen for the sounds that he can make.

Repeat sounds back to him. Have fun imitating each other.

You can teach your child to eat by sharing meals together.

Expect a mess when your child is learning to eat.

Offer foods that are easy to pick up with fingers or a spoon.

Let’s Talk...

If your child will not eat vegetables...

- Continue to offer vegetables often
- Eat vegetables yourself
- Offer raw vegetables with dip
- Offer different shapes, like shredded or sliced
- Offer fruit.

Between 18 and 24 months, there is a surge in language learning.

By 24 months, a toddler knows at least 50 words and can begin to form 2-word sentences, like “Want book” or “More milk”.

Let’s Talk...
**Let’s Talk…**

**Soup**

What is your favourite soup? *(Stir it up, stir it up!)*

What is in the soup?

Is the soup hot or cold?

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**Plums**

What does a plum taste like? *(sweet, sour, bitter, etc.)*

What is in the middle? *(Be sure to not swallow the pit!)*

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**Let’s Talk…**

**Hummus**

What vegetables are good for dipping?

What are your favourite types of dip? *(yogurt, salad dressing, salsa, etc.)*

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**Asparagus**

Do you know what this vegetable is?

Can you name other green foods?
Play and language go hand in hand.

Pretend play encourages language skills, literacy, thinking and imagination.

Let’s Talk...

Use lots of action words (verbs) when you are cooking and eating with your child.

Examples:

Can you stir this batter?
Can you mash these potatoes?
Let’s slurp these noodles.

Let’s Talk...

If your child will only eat certain foods...

Offer a variety of healthy foods that your whole family will enjoy.

Let your child decide whether to eat and how much to eat.

If you ignore picky eating, it is less likely to continue.

Let’s Talk...

Talk to your child about food traditions from your own culture and family, and what they mean to you.

Kids who eat meals with their families have a stronger sense of belonging.
Let’s Talk…

Carrots

Do you like carrots cooked or cut into thin strips?
(Fun fact: carrots help you to see in the dark!)

Let’s Talk…

Broccoli

Broccoli looks like little trees.
How many trees are on your plate?
(Let’s count…)

Let’s Talk…

Bananas

Are bananas soft or hard?
Is the colour the same on the inside and the outside?
Do we eat the peel?

Let’s Talk…

Pumpkins

I am round and orange.
I like to come out at Halloween.
What am I?
A parent’s role is to offer 3 meals and 2-3 snacks each day.

If a child refuses to eat, a skipped meal or snack will not harm her.

Remove uneaten food without comment.

Do not force a child to eat.

Offer a healthy snack in a couple hours.

Offer vegetables or fruit with every meal and snack.

Foods that are choking hazards, like grapes or raw carrots, should be chopped into small pieces.

Talk to your toddler using simple sentences.

Ask “what” or “where” questions often.

Examples:

What should we have for supper?

Where do carrots grow?

Young children have small appetites, and high calorie needs for growth, activity and development.

Offer healthy meals and snacks at regular times each day.

Dish out small amounts of food and let your child ask for more.
Let’s Talk...

Cinnamon

Have you ever smelled or eaten cinnamon?

Let’s think about foods that have cinnamon in them. (oatmeal, French toast, etc.)

Let’s Talk...

Snack Time

What is your favorite snack?

Let’s Talk...

Toast

What do you like to spread on toast? (margarine, peanut butter, etc.)

Let’s Talk...

Orange

I’m juicy and sweet.

I am round like the sun. What am I? (Yes, I am an orange.)
Healthy snacks should include foods from 2 or more food groups from Canada’s Food Guide.

Examples:

- Peanut butter (Meat & Alternatives) and apple slices (Vegetables & Fruit) = 2 Food Groups
- Whole grain crackers (Grain Products) and cheese (Milk and Alternatives) = 2 Food Groups

Let's Talk...

- Turn off screens (computers, TVs and phones) so you can talk and connect at meals.
  - For children under 2 years of age, screen time is not recommended at all.
  - For children 2-4 years of age, screen time should be limited to less than 1 hour per day.

Let's Talk...

- Water is the best drink to quench thirst.
- Milk should be offered at meals and snacks only.
- Juice can lead to picky eating and cavities.

Avoid juice or limit to 1/2 cup (125 mL) per day with a meal or snack.

Let's Talk...

- Children need an adult to help them brush their teeth until they are 8 years old.
  - Use fluoride toothpaste twice each day.

Children 3 years of age and younger:
  - Use a grain of rice size amount of fluoride toothpaste.

Children over 3 years of age:
  - Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.
Let’s Talk…

Strawberries

I love sweet, juicy strawberries.
Do you like strawberries whole or sliced?
What can you dip them in? (yogurt, pudding, etc.)

Let’s Talk…

Cauliflower

Let’s explore cauliflower! (Talk about its colour, shape, size, smell, feel, etc.)

Let’s Talk…

Berries

Berries are sweet and come in many colours.
Let’s think about all of the berries that we know.
What is your favourite berry?

Let’s Talk…

Deer

Deer is a type of wild meat.
Have you ever tasted deer?
Can you name other types of wild meat? (elk, caribou, moose, etc.)
Let’s Talk...

Your child learns to eat when you eat the same foods together.

Don’t expect your child to eat foods that you don’t.

You are his role model.

Let’s Talk...

Tooth brushing will not clean areas where teeth touch each other - these areas are at risk for tooth decay.

Flossing helps remove plaque and food between the teeth and under the gum line.

Floss picks are easy to use when flossing a child’s teeth.

Let’s Talk...

Bacteria can be passed from parents to children by sharing food, drinks, spoons, toothbrushes or licking soothers.

This bacteria can cause tooth decay.

Have a separate toothbrush for every person in the family.

Let’s Talk...

Traditional foods vary by community, culture, family and season.

Some cherished traditional foods in Canada are fish, game, berries, seafood, roots and plants.

Talk to your children about your family or your culture’s traditional foods.
Let’s Talk…

Clams

Clams live deep in the sand at the beach.

What is your favorite way to eat clams? (steamed, fritters, chowder, etc.)

Porridge

Porridge is a great way to satisfy your morning appetite.

What do you like to put on your porridge? (cinnamon, nuts, fruit, etc.)

Let’s Talk…

Mushrooms

What is your favourite way to eat mushrooms? (cooked, raw, in soup, etc.)

Let’s talk about all of the shapes of mushrooms.

(Note: Not all mushrooms are safe to eat!)

Let’s Talk…

Crabapples

Crabapples grow in bunches.

How many crabapples do you see?
Cooking together is a great way to teach your child important life skills.

Young children can help with simple tasks such as stirring, mashing and rolling.

Older children can learn to read and follow simple recipes.

Let’s Talk...

Offer iron-rich foods at least 2 times each day.
Iron grows bodies and minds.

Iron-rich foods include fish, meat, chicken, iron-fortified baby cereal, beans and legumes.

Let’s Talk...

Children need to see a new food up to 20 times before they will taste it.

Even if your child refuses to try a new food, continue to offer it without pressure.

Serve a new food along with foods that your child likes to eat.

Let’s Talk...

Children age 1 to 4 years need at least 3 hours of physical activity each day.

Any activity that gets your kids moving counts like crawling, hopping, running, dancing and climbing!
Let’s Talk...

**Fish**

What is your favorite way to eat salmon? *(baked, smoked, barbequed, on a sandwich, etc.)*

Can you think of other types of fish *that are good to eat?*

Let’s Talk...

**Water**

Let’s think about where water comes from. *(from rain, snow caps, rivers, oceans, etc.)*

Let’s Talk...

**Feasting**

If you could have a feast, who would you invite?

What foods would you serve?

Let’s Talk...

**Preserving**

We can pick berries in the summer. How can we save them for winter? *(freeze, make jam, make fruit leather, etc.)*
Choose water most often to quench thirst.

Soft drinks, juice, fruit drinks and sport drinks contain acids which dissolve tooth enamel and cause cavities.

Diet drinks do not contain sugar, but they still contain acids that can harm teeth.

Let’s Talk...

Children need healthy fat in their diet for growth and development.

Fish, such as salmon, sardines, mackerel and halibut, are good sources of healthy fats.

Other good sources are peanuts, nuts, seeds and avocados.

Let’s Talk...

Picking berries and other fruits and vegetables is a great way for children to learn where food comes from.

Berry picking helps children develop coordination and patience.

Children also learn to respect the land.

Let’s Talk...

Feasting connects family, friends, food and culture.

It is a time when community comes together to celebrate, share, learn and mourn.
Eggs

I am oval. I am sometimes brown and sometimes white. My shell is very delicate. If you drop me, I will break! Splat! What am I?

Lunch

What do you like to have for lunch? Where do you usually eat your lunch? (home, school, daycare, etc.)

Let’s Talk...

Let’s Add Our Own Questions

Have fun with your own questions. Write them down on this card.

Let’s Talk...

Let’s Draw Our Favorite Meal

Ask your child to draw her favourite meal. Ask what she drew. Why is this her favourite meal? Tell your child about your favourite meal.
Let’s Talk…

Offer at least 3 of the 4 Food Groups from Canada’s Food Guide at each meal.

Example:

- Scrambled eggs (Meat & Alternatives)
- Slice of toast (Grain Products)
- Banana (Vegetables & Fruits)
- Glass of milk (Milk & Alternatives)

= 4 Food Groups

Let’s Talk…

Protein helps build strong bodies.

Eggs are a great source of protein, iron and vitamins.

Other good sources of protein are meat, chicken, fish, beans and lentils.

Let’s Talk…

Taking turns promotes conversation.

Encourage “turn taking” with your child. Strive for about 5 turns in a conversation.

Let’s Talk…

Babies should see a dentist or a dental hygienist within 6 months of their first tooth coming in or by 1 year of age.

Children from families that receive Premium Assistance for their BC Medical Services Plan (MSP) may have dental coverage under the Healthy Kids Program.

Call your local health unit to learn more.
Let’s Talk…

Let’s Make Our Menu

Plan a meal with your child.
What foods are on the menu and why?
Is it breakfast, lunch or dinner?
Who would you like to share this meal with?

Let’s Talk…

Let’s Make a Grocery List

Create a real or imaginary grocery list with your child. Ask your child to name foods that he would like to buy. Take the list with you shopping and have your child identify the foods in the store.

Let’s Talk…

Let’s Write a Family Recipe

With your child, write down the steps of a favourite recipe that your family enjoys. Read the recipe to your child out loud, then ask her to repeat the steps.

Share food together and create memories for a lifetime!
Meals are a good time to check-in with your family without any distractions.

Turn off the screens - TV, computer, phones and video games - and enjoy meaningful conversation.

Kids only grow up once.

Offer a variety of healthy foods for your child to grow up strong.

Limit less healthy foods for special occasions.

Resources

Island Health
www.viha.ca/children

HealthLink BC
www.healthlinkbc.ca

Healthy Families BC
www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca

Better Together BC
www.bettertogetherbc.ca

To print your own cards, visit:
www.bettertogetherbc.ca/learn/resources

Children enjoy learning new words.

Adults can help kids to expand their vocabulary by naming and describing what they are doing and objects around them.

Adults can also talk about what items are used for and where they come from.