

# Winning Ways with Children When Eating Out

Eating out with young children can be a stressful experience. Restaurant employees get nervous, and parents are on edge, never knowing quite what to expect. Is staying home the answer?

Here are some tips from experienced parents to make your eating out experience more enjoyable for all.



**1. Choose a “child-friendly” location.** Some restaurants are simply more suitable for young guests—fast food places, family-style restaurants, “coffee shops,” or sidewalk cafes, for example. You will feel more relaxed about dining and you’ll often get more help keeping your child(ren) happy.

**2. Phone first.** If you are going to a restaurant for the first time, call ahead to make sure children are welcome. Ask if they have high chairs or booster seats; if not, you can take a clip-on seat that fits most tables or improvise a booster seat by wrapping a couple of old telephone books with contact paper. Find out if you can place your order before you arrive to cut down on waiting time once you are there.

**3. Bring your own.** You know your child best. If he needs special equipment, like a bottle or cup with a spout, bring it along. Diversions in the form of snacks or toys can keep your little one occupied until your meal comes.

**4. Keep it as familiar as possible.** If your child eats little or is not used to a variety of foods, order a small portion of a food he does know, split dinners between two or more children, or bring along peanut butter and jelly. It will cost you less, waste less, and in all likelihood, your child will be happier (and so

will you)!

**5. Arrive early.** Try to get to the restaurant at an off-peak time. This way you can avoid long waits and crowded conditions.

**6. Try to sit by a window.** The activity outside can provide novelty for your child while you are waiting to be served.

**7. The quick fix.** If you could not order ahead of time, ask if there are foods that can be prepared quickly. If you must wait for your food, one parent can take a restless child for a short walk to the lobby or parking lot.

Every time you eat out at a restaurant, it is a learning experience for your young child and you. What does not work one time may work the next. Rest assured, as you both get better at it, there will be better days and better restaurant experiences ahead.

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