

Tackling Picky Eating

UF-Gainesville Center for Autism and
Related Disabilities



Prereq. skills, cont.

- Oral motor behaviors
- Fine motor behaviors
- Self-feeding behaviors
- Clear expectations
- Reinforcer assessment
- Sitting at the table
- Concept of “finished”
- Communication skills



Food selectivity assessment

- Current foods
- Past attempts to address problem
- Family's top priorities for new foods
- Favorite foods and drinks
- Eating environment
- Eating expectations
- Medical and dietary restrictions



Getting started

- Target sitting at the table if necessary (modify portion)
- Meal and snack schedule
- Consider monitoring fluid intake
- Limit (eliminate) grazing
- Location for meals versus snacks
- Mealtime visual clutter and distractions



First/then: sitting at table

FIRST

THEN



Sit at table



Get cotton candy

Treatment tips

- Target only one new food at a time
- Select a food that is similar in texture/consistency/taste to a preferred food
- Keep expected portion very small (reward clean plate)



First/then: clean plate

FIRST



Eat dinner

THEN

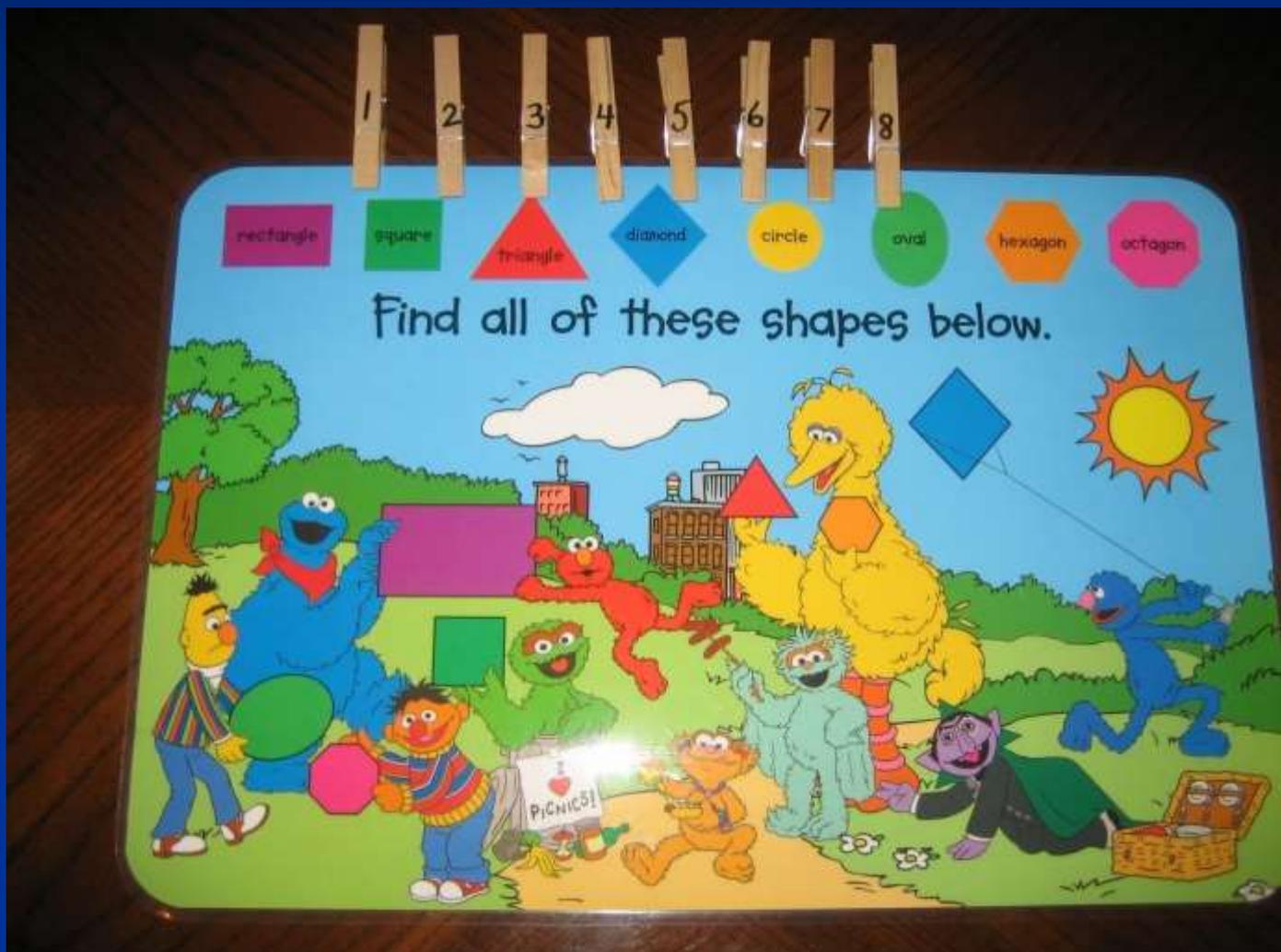


Get cake

Countdown, example



Another countdown example



Desensitization

- Separate plate
- Same plate
- Smell
- Touch
- Taste eat



Keep the bites small

Use the same food each time

Condiments

- Allow child to choose a preferred condiment
- Cover the new food with the condiment, but make sure your child can still SEE the food item
- Over time, decrease the amount of condiment



Preferred food vessel

- Choose a preferred food to act as a “carrier” for the new food
- Over time, decrease the size or amount of the vessel



Chaser

- Allow your child to choose a favorite beverage that (s)he uses as a “chaser” to help swallow the new food
- Over time, decrease the use of the chaser
- Make sure your child only has access to the chaser when (s)he’s eating the new food



Dealing with meltdowns

- Are the expectations clear?
- Can you modify your expectations before meltdown occurs?
- Does your child have a way to request escape appropriately?



Important tips

- Don't try to “sneak” new foods in; it will make kids untrusting about all foods you present
- Only rely on incorporating pureed foods (e.g., zucchini, squash, etc.) if you are concerned about nutrition, and even then, don't rely on this strategy alone— use another treatment simultaneously



Tips, cont.

- Don't introduce more than one NPF at a time
- Don't forget choices
- Reinforce your child for other meal-related behaviors
- Use visuals (pictures and gestures): save verbal language for praise



Remember

- Most “typical” kids need to be expose to a new food around 7-10 times before they are willing to try it
- Don't give up!

