

TOOL TIP # 8

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 at 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. 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 they need special supplies, like a bottle or cup with a spout, bring it along. Diversions in the forms of snacks or toys can keep your little one occupied until your meal comes. Example: keep a pad of paper, a few crayons or markers, and a couple of small cars stashed in your purse. In a pinch, use the back of paper placemats and any pen or pencil you can find for games.

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

8. Bail out.

If all your efforts fail and your child starts falling apart in the restaurant, have one parent or an accompanying adult or mature teenager exit with him/her quickly to avoid spoiling the meal for everyone else. You can take home food that they have not eaten.

Every time you eat out at a restaurant, it is a learning experience for your baby or young child and for 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.

Adapted from: "Side Orders," American Baby Magazine, June 1990.

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