

Mealtime Conversation Starters

Meal and snack time are prime opportunities to engage children in conversations which is critical to their social, emotional, language and communication development. Conversations also make for an enjoyable mealtime. Adults should take this opportunity to model language skills using a wide variety of descriptive words and simple sentences, asking open-ended questions, and allowing time for children to respond. Adults must be careful not to dominate the conversation and not interrupt children when they are having conversations. It is important to encourage conversation among peers by inviting them to share their ideas and ask them to respond to their peer's comments.

Conversations while eating should not only relate to food. Recap the day's events and talk about what experiences they will be participating in later that day. For example, ask about what they saw on their morning walk as they collected leaves. Also, follow the children's lead when they bring up a topic for discussion. When a child shares he went to his Grandpa's house ask what they did. Restating a child's comment validates his/her contribution to the conversation and often the child or peers will respond. Keep in mind young children do not have an accurate sense of time. What they did "last night" may actually have happened several days ago. Focus on the event the child is sharing and not on the time of the event.

Talk about favorites such as colors, foods, and animals.

*"Did you know my favorite color is orange, just like these mandarin oranges."
"What is your favorite food? What color is it?"*

Talk about pets, what they eat, what they like to play with.

"Do you have a pet? What does your cat like to eat? What kind of toys does your cat like?"

Talk about the textures, flavors and temperatures of the foods on the table.

Use descriptive words: chilled, diced, juicy, tart.

*"This orange is very juicy and sweet." "This kiwi fruit taste tart"
"This soup is very hot. We better let it cool a bit before we eat it."*

"These peas are good. They grow in a garden like ours. What vegetables could we grow in our garden?"

*"What is your favorite book?
What part of that story is your favorite?"*

"What did you see while you were out on your walk today?"

"I saw you building with blocks, what structure did you build?"

"Tell me about the picture you have on your shirt."

"After breakfast we need to tend to our garden. What will we need to do?"

"Remember that butterfly we saw outside this morning, where do you think she was flying to?"

"What is your favorite color?"

"Who goes to the store to buy food? Who do you go with? What do you buy?"

"What would you like to do after lunch?"

"On my way here this morning, I saw a school bus. Where do you think it was going? What did you see?"

"If snow could fall in any flavor, what flavor would you like?"

"What items in the room is the same color as this tomato?"

"It looks windy outside, the leaves on the trees are moving. Do you think we'll need our jackets?"

"What songs would you like to sing today? Who would like to lead the song?"

"What was your favorite part of the story we read today?"

"What is your favorite activity to do outside?"

"I rode my bike to the park last night, what did you do?"

"Who wants to be the first to try this cucumbers? Who wants to be second?"