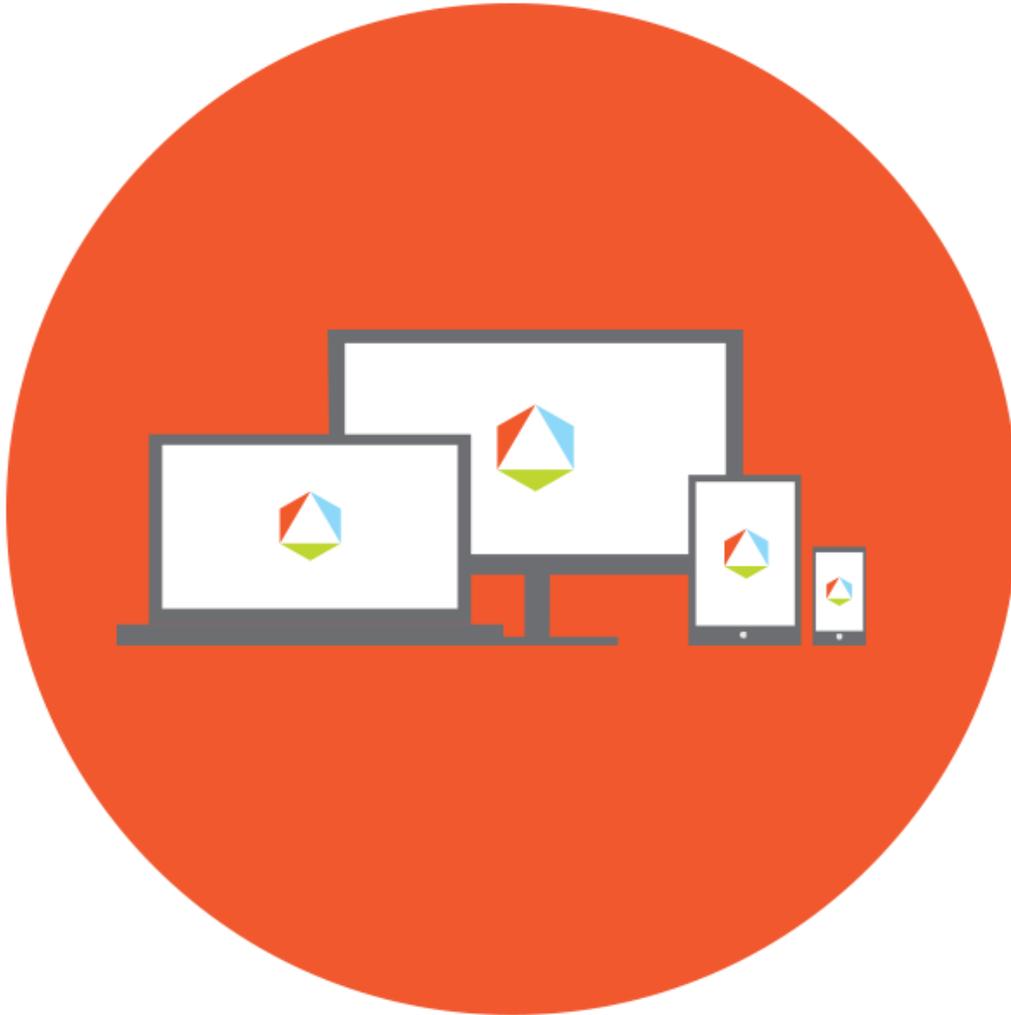




FIRSTPATH
AUTISM



Lesson Guide
28. Eating Skills

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Overview

Teaches:	Appropriate eating skills, including use of utensils and napkin, and sitting at the table for the entire meal or snack. Can also teach supplementary skills such as asking to be excused when finished, and clearing own place setting.
Before beginning:	Child should have already mastered Cooperation Skills, Following Instructions, and basic Asking/Requesting Skills.
Why it's important:	The ability to behave appropriately and participate in meals at home and other locations, such as school, friends' homes, restaurants, etc. is an important cultural and social skill that allows the child to build relationships and increase overall access to rewarding experiences. On a more basic level, the ability to complete the physical actions/motor skills required to eat will build the child's independence and the family's enjoyment of mealtime.
Materials needed:	Appropriate utensils, napkin, food. A booster seat may be helpful depending upon the child's age and size.
Generalization activities:	Eating at the homes of friends/family, school cafeteria, restaurants. Pretend play scenarios—server/customer, tea parties, birthday parties, and snack time during play dates.



Steps

Prepare

1. This lesson is taught using basic behavioral principles already learned, but may appear somewhat less structured than other lessons since it is a naturally occurring activity. This does not mean that you as the teacher will be any less intentional, though; just that the teaching may appear more natural due to its context.
2. Plan which target(s) you will focus on. It should not be all targets, or sometimes even multiple targets, at once.
3. Ensure that the foods you are presenting support your intended learning target. For example, if using a fork is the target, select foods that easily speared with a fork, rather than those that require more coordination or are slippery in texture. On the same note, if you are teaching use of a napkin, select a food that is slightly messier so that the child will have a greater number of opportunities to practice using the napkin.
4. Have several rewards and highly preferred items ready and available. However, keep in mind that unrelated (or "artificial") may or may not be as necessary during this particular lesson, since the natural reward of eating is built into the nature of the lesson. For example, when the child uses the fork correctly, he will get the natural reward of eating the food that he has just put into his mouth.
5. Have data collection ready.

Teach

1. Present the instruction or expectation to the child in clear language, as little as possible to keep things simple and help increase understanding.
2. Teach to the child in this lesson, using his or her specific strengths. You will do this in all lessons to some extent, but because this lesson area can be learned in so many different ways, you will want to play to the child's known strengths. For example, some children will benefit from mainly a vocal "following instructions" approach where you tell them what to do and they listen to your words to learn; other children may benefit more from you modeling the skill so they can observe and imitate it; others may need physical hand over hand prompting to help them *feel* the skill in action.
3. Regardless of which method you use, your primary goals are the following:
 - To teach one skill at a time until the child can do it independently (or with minimal help, based on his/her age).
 - To be intentional in gradually fading any prompts or teaching techniques you are using, so that the child does not learn to depend on the prompt but rather to do the skill independently.



--To require consistent follow-through of what you asked the child to do, as with all lessons.

4. Keep in mind that with this particular lesson, the learning process is more of a gradual shaping of skills, rather than a right/wrong or correct/incorrect response mentality. The child may make gradual progress and get slowly better each time he practices the skill, but often he/she will not fully "master" a new skill within one teaching session.

TYPICAL ORDER OF LEARNING TARGETS:

1. Self-feeding off of a plate (i.e., finger foods)
2. Drinking from regular cup
3. Using spoon
4. Using fork
5. Wiping face/hands with napkin
6. Sitting at table for duration of meal/snack (for age-appropriate amount of time). This target may actually be made up of several smaller targets, gradually moving the child more toward the ultimate amount of time desired (e.g., starting at 5 minutes, then 10 minutes, then 15 minutes, etc.)
7. Asking to "please be excused" when finished eating, before getting up from table. (This may initially be taught as speech imitation.)
8. Helping to clear own place, by taking plate/cup to counter or sink. (This target may best be measured and taught by using a Task Analysis, since it consists of several steps.)