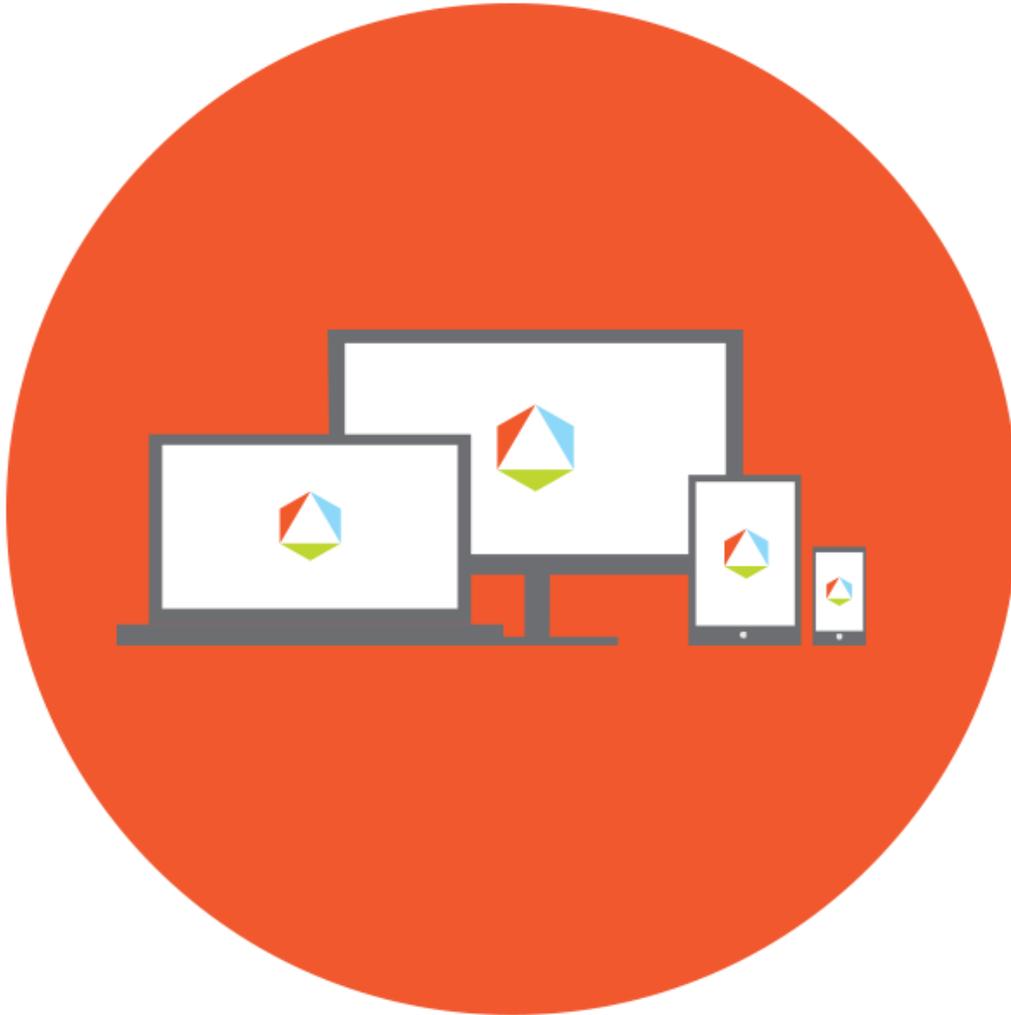




**FIRSTPATH**  
AUTISM



Lesson Guide

## 29. Eating New Foods

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# Overview

Teaches:	Trying/tasting new foods, and/or eating small amounts of non-preferred foods. Also, as a more advanced skill, how to accept or appropriately decline offered foods.
Before beginning:	The child needs to have mastered Eating skills, Cooperation Skills, Asking/Requesting Skills, and ability to follow instructions. It may also help if the child has mastered use of fork and spoon, though this is not required.
Why it's important:	This skill is important for nutritional reasons, to help ensure that the child's dietary needs are being met in a healthy way. In addition, it is an important social skill since being able to eat or politely decline offered foods has the potential to directly impact relationships.
Materials needed:	At least 3-4 new or unfamiliar foods, along with known and preferred foods. Appropriate utensils, napkin, and booster seat, if applicable.
Generalization activities:	Eating at friends' homes, school cafeteria, restaurants.



# Steps

## Prepare

1. This lesson can be conducted during naturally occurring snack time or mealtime.
2. Prepare several foods, both new and familiar, to be part of this lesson.
3. For this lesson, it is important (more so than the Eating Skills lesson) that reinforcers be evaluated and are present to be delivered when the child does the requested skill. This is important since many of these foods may either be non-preferred or unfamiliar, so we do not know if eating/tasting them will function as a natural reward or not. Therefore, known preferred foods should be available for the child as a reward for eating/tasting the new food.
4. It will help to know the child and his eating history in this situation, to give you an idea of where in the list of targets it will be the most successful to begin. For some children, you will be in the phase of teaching tolerance of food on the plate for a week or more. For other children, you may be able to start out at asking them to take a small bite. Plan your starting point in advance and then adjust if needed.
5. Know that this is one lesson where you as the teacher are put in a unique position because the desired response cannot be fully assisted as it can with some other lessons/skills. You do not want to end up in a situation of force-feeding the child, where choking or injury results. This is one skill where requiring a response may require waiting the child out for a significant period of time (i.e., not allowing the child to leave the table/situation until he has complied with your instruction). However, if a response is consistently required, and the teacher faithfully utilizes the waiting out period as needed, then the waiting out period should begin to decrease and ultimately should not occur every time (or at all). In other words, though it requires more time and is more inconvenient to implement, utilizing the "waiting it out" technique is usually effective and therefore a temporary solution.
6. Have data collection ready.

## Teach

1. One way to present this lesson is to have 1 new food on the plate, along with 2-3 other known and preferred foods. For some children, this will help encourage them to try the new food and lessen the "heaviness" of the expectation; for others, it will make trying the new food more difficult. You may need to try presenting the new food alone, to be eaten first, if presenting it along with others is not effective.
2. If starting at target 1, all you will do is present the child with a plate of food that contains both preferred food and at least one new food. The child is required, at minimum, to leave the new food on the plate (e.g., not to push it



- off or engage in a tantrum). The child may not be required to eat the new food at this stage.
3. However, if starting at target 2 or 3, ask the child to try the new food. Be specific in your instruction, asking the child to either "lick" the food or "eat" the food: each requires a different response from the child, so be clear in your expectation.
  4. The child will then be required to respond to this instruction as with any other, by tolerating (leaving the food alone), licking, kissing or chewing/swallowing the food (depending upon the target).
  5. Upon a successful response, the child should be praised and given the pre-selected reinforcement (if it is not already on his plate).
  6. The lesson should always be concluded with the child being able to eat preferred foods, to encourage good eating habits and so that eating/mealtimes in general do not become an aversive/negative activity.

## TYPICAL ORDER OF LEARNING TARGETS:

1. Tolerating the presence new food on plate (i.e., not removing it, throwing it, engaging in tantrums, etc.)
2. Licking or kissing the new food (not required to chew or swallow)
3. Chewing and swallowing a small bite of the new food
4. Chewing and swallowing 2-3 small bites of the new food
5. Learning to say, "No thank you" when offered non-preferred food.

**NOTE:** This target should not be taught until the child has mastered the skill of first-time compliance in trying new food when asked to do so. If this target is taught too early, it will sabotage your efforts in teaching the child to try new foods. Keep in mind that after learning this target, the child should not be allowed to use it every time he/she is asked to try a new food. There should continue to be times when he/she is required to eat a new food. Being clear in your instructions and wording may help in this area. For example, when there is a choice in the matter, say, "Would you like to try...?"; when there is not a choice and it is a requirement, say, "I need you to take a bite of \_\_\_\_, please".