

## Top 10 Tips - Dining Skills for the Visually Impaired Child

1	<b>Social and educational</b>	When supporting children with their dining skills consider the following points: Eating is a social and educational experience for all young children as well as being a practical necessity to be enjoyed by everyone. It should always be a positive experience.
2	<b>Sitting comfortably</b>	Ensure that the child is sitting square to the table and is at the most suitable distance and height in relation to the table for comfort and correct posture for eating. It is usually about right if the child sits approximately one hands span distance from the table and at a height whereby the elbows are at right angles to the tabletop.
3	<b>Choosing the right equipment</b>	Choose cutlery that is appropriate in length, weight, thickness of handles and grip type to accommodate the child's needs. For those children with some useful vision, select plates that are in a contrasting colour to the food on their plate. Blue is often a good choice as there are no blue foods. Some children may benefit from using a plate with a raised edge or with a guard which clips to most standard sized plates. If the plate gets pushed along the table, place a non-stick rubber dycem mat underneath the plate to keep it in place.
4	<b>The food on their plate</b>	Tell the child what is for dinner and describe the position of foods on their plate if this is necessary. It is better to present small amounts on the plate initially so that the child has the opportunity of experiencing success, i.e. completing their meal and with less risk of spilling their food onto the table. The amount of food will obviously vary from child to child and staff will use their own discretion here.
5	<b>Holding cutlery</b>	Help the child to hold their cutlery correctly if necessary. When stabbing food it is necessary to locate food with the knife before stabbing with the fork. To get food onto the fork you often need to "push" food across the plate. To do this, it is usually best to keep the knife still and push the food towards the knife with the fork.
6	<b>Drinks</b>	When pouring drinks, encourage the child to use the index finger of their free hand to detect the level of the liquid as it nears the top of the glass/cup. Children should be encouraged to use their hearing for the same purpose. Using a liquid level indicator is also helpful especially if the drinks are hot. Practise using a liquid level indicator on separate occasions.
7	<b>Time</b>	Allow the child the time to eat at their own pace. However, time constraints must be conveyed to the child for their overall understanding of the experience.
8	<b>Clearing away</b>	Encourage the child to place their cutlery neatly together on the plate on completion of their meal. They should stack their plate, cup and cutlery and dispose of any waste foods carefully when everyone or the majority have finished eating.
9	<b>Keeping safe</b>	Hand washing and general hygiene rules and routines must be conveyed to the child. It is important that the child understands correct safe handling of all the equipment they may use. For health and safety reasons the child should be accompanied throughout the whole of the dining room experience.
10	<b>Finally</b>	The points mentioned above are general guidelines intended as a framework for thinking. We need to be flexible and many points may need to be modified to the needs of the individual. Eating should be a pleasurable experience and such guidelines are obviously meant to assist the child and not hinder them.