**Tips to encourage your child to sit at the table**

**Prepare and support**

* Adjust your eating environment to reduce sensory overwhelm (see ‘Preparing your child’s eating space’ on the toothPASTE website).
* Prepare your child's body for sitting with enjoyable activities.
* It is helpful to ensure your child has a comfortable and supportive seating arrangement
* Provide a favourite (washable) fidget for reassurance and positive sensory input. However, avoid fidgets that result in very distracted eating.
* Some children find the additional deep pressure feedback from a weighted lap pad helpful.

**Communication and modelling**

* You could tell your child what you want them to do using brief and positive language like ‘food goes here’ instead of ‘don’t throw your food’.
* It may help to actively model eating the same foods as your child. Try showing exaggerated chewing when they are learning to chew. The best person to model is someone your child trusts and looks up to.
* Sitting beside or at right angles to your child can help them feel they are not under a watchful gaze, reducing pressure.

**Praising**

* It’s helpful to quietly observe and praise achievements in a way that your child is comfortable with. We suggest avoiding using enthusiastic praise when your child is eating to prevent overwhelming anxious eaters.
* Try and find positive things to notice and say so, even when a meal went less well. Did they come to the table for 30 seconds, or take one sip of drink?
* Children will respond differently to positive feedback. For some, praise can be seen as an uncomfortable demand to repeat behaviours.

**Meal Presentation**

* Present food in an appealing way and avoid overloading their plate.
* Allow your child to decide how much and in what order they eat their food, and whether they use their hands or utensils.
* It’s ok to eat breakfast foods at dinner if that is what works.
* Be prepared for mess and try to avoid frequently cleaning up around your child during the meal.

See ‘Preparing your child's meal snacks and drinks’ on the toothPASTE website.

**Make mealtimes fun**

* As much as possible, keep mealtimes fun and avoid talking about things that have gone wrong during the day.
* Engage your child with simple table activities related to the meal, like helping to serve food or discussing the food's colour, shape, sounds, and texture. Relate this to books you have read together or things you have seen. For example, ‘This is like the red strawberry in your book about .....’

**Result and restore**

* Allow some time to rest and restore after a meal or snack. It may be helpful to build this into their routine so they can anticipate a low-demand break after eating.

**Using electronics (TVs, tablets and phones)**

* Screens tend to result in distracted eating and reduced opportunities to connect and learn. If it is the only way your child will currently eat, do not remove it suddenly. Instead gradually reduce the amount of time it is used as your child becomes more comfortable around food.

**Be flexible**

* Some children may need to start or end their meals differently from other family members. Allowing them to join the table after everyone else has started or finish earlier can reduce mealtime stress.