



Winning Ways When Dining Out With Children

Eating in restaurants with your children doesn't have to be nerve wracking experience. Here are a few tips to help make dining out with kids more enjoyable:

Choose a child-friendly location. Does the restaurant you're considering have a kids' menu? This is a good indicator of whether or not children are welcome there.

Call ahead. Ask some questions: Are children welcome? Does the restaurant have high chairs or booster seats? Will you have to wait for a table? Can you order your meal in advance to cut down on waiting once you are there?

Avoid the rush. Dine at off-peak times. Arrive at the restaurant before or after the busy times to avoid long lines and waits for meals to be served.

Sit by a window. Kids enjoy watching cars and trucks pass by. A window seat may provide children with a pleasant way to pass the time until their meals are served.

Order small. Don't overwhelm your child with food. Order from the children's menu or share part of your meal with your child. Don't expect your children to finish their meals if they are full. Ask your server to put leftovers in a container to take home.

Stick to the familiar. Order food your child likes. A restaurant usually isn't the best place to expand a child's appreciation for different foods.

Keep them busy. Crayons, books, and quiet games can keep kids occupied before meals are served. Take along a notepad and pencils so they can draw. Play tic-tac-toe or hangman.

Leave. If all your efforts fail and your child misbehaves (or can not stop crying) in the restaurant, have a parent or a mature teenager leave with the child. This will avoid spoiling the meal for everyone else. You can take home the food your child has not eaten.

Remember. Every time you eat out it is a learning experience for your child and for you. What does not work one time may work the next. Rest assured, as you both get used to the experience, there will be better days ahead.