

Finding Your Feeding Therapy Partner

If you and your child are experiencing challenges, a feeding therapist can evaluate your child's baseline skills and deficits, help you provide safe foods that your child can manage, help your child progress, and help you feel confident and supported at home. In short, the right therapist or feeding team can be incredibly helpful. But a poor fit can slow your child's progress, so finding a good therapy partner is very important. Ask your support network (other parents, online communities, doctors) for recommendations, and arrange to interview each prospective therapist. Here are a few questions to ask and begin a dialogue as you look for the right help for your family.

- How do you describe your approach to feeding therapy?
- Do you believe that children are capable of self-regulating intake? Or do you think we have to monitor and enforce quantity minimums or teach portion control?
- Are you familiar with Marsh Dunn Klein's "Get Permission" approach, Ellyn Satter's division of responsibility, or responsive feeding, and do you incorporate any of these concepts?
- How many years have you been doing feeding therapy? From whom did you learn? Where?
- Do you have specific training to address oral motor issues (if interviewing an occupational therapist or OT) or will a speech-language pathologist (SLP) evaluate my child?
- Where do you do therapy?
- Would I be able to stay in the room?
- Can I observe or watch a video of a treatment session?
- What kind of behavior management do you use? Do you use rewards or negative reinforcement? For example, do you show disapproval or hold food in front of the child's mouth until she gives in, or do you use rewards like praise, stickers, or toys to motivate the child to eat?
- How do you handle a child who refuses to participate?
- How do you present food? Is it served as an option (family style) or as the one thing he has to eat?
- Do I bring my own food? Do you have food options to help me?
- What kind of parent education and support can you offer? Do you have suggestions for parent support groups or forums?
- How do you help families integrate your advice at home?
- What can you offer if any of your suggested techniques result in conflict or a power struggle?
- Can you connect me with a few parents with whom you have worked?
- How will we know when we are finished with therapy?

Reflect on the answers you get to these questions and what they mean to you. Trust your gut: *if what your therapist asks you or your child to do increases conflict, anxiety, or gagging, it is likely to make matters worse.* Good therapy can make a huge difference, but bad therapy can be worse than no therapy.