

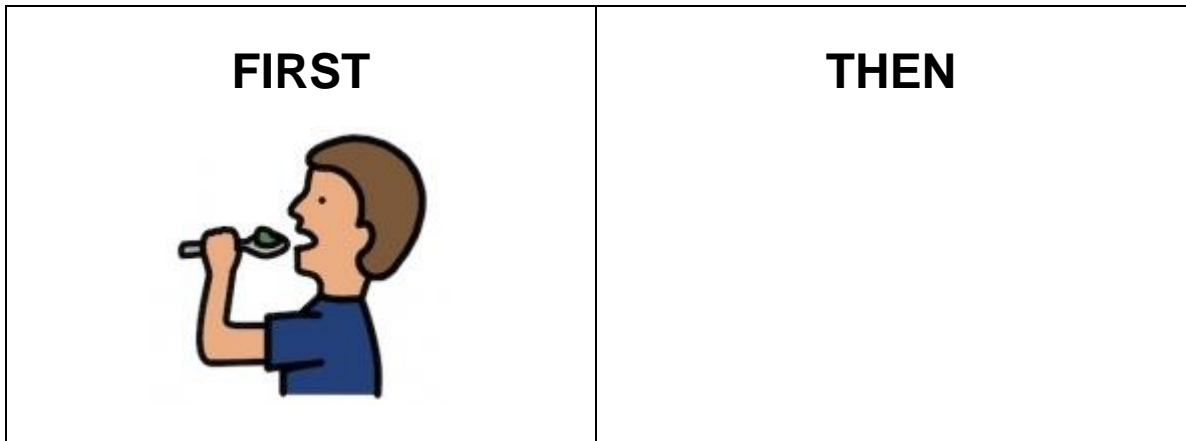
Teaching Independence with a Fork/Spoon

It is important to help your child learn to feed him/herself, as this builds independence, fine motor skills and enables your child to be more involved in the eating process. One of the best things about teaching cutlery use is that there are lots of opportunities available each day for practice.

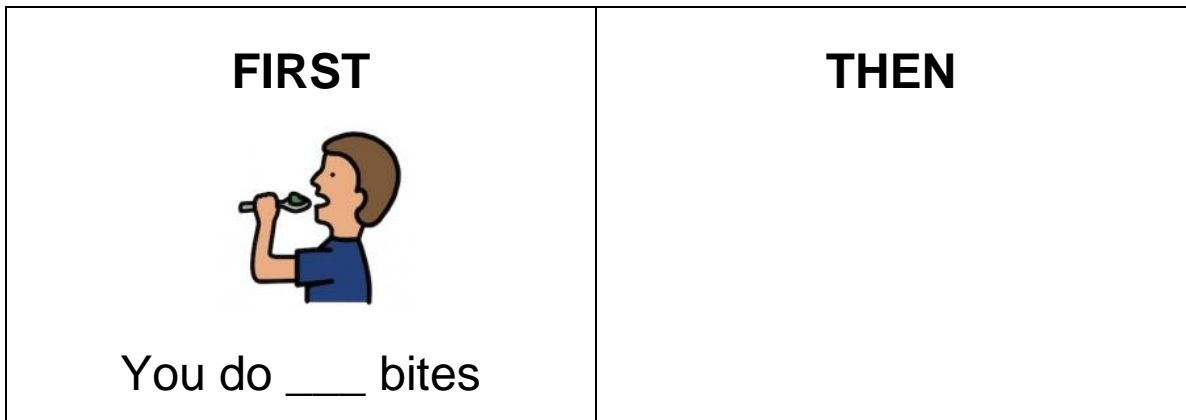
This tip sheet provides suggestions to help increase your child's independence in feeding him/herself.

- Load the utensil and hold it about a foot away from the mouth. Allow your child to reach out to pull the caregiver's arm in so he/she can take a bite, or move their head forward to take the bite. This seems like a small step but is important in messaging to your child that he/she is an active participant in mealtimes.
- Once your child is comfortable doing more of the feeding on his/her own, try loading the spoon or fork with food and then pass it to her to hold.
- Highly praise your child for feeding him/herself: "Great job holding the spoon!"; "Nice work eating by yourself!"
- If your child is resistant to wanting to hold the spoon, try to get him/her to **eat only 1 spoonful** doing hand over hand and give praise for efforts. This can be done either at the beginning of the meal or the end of the meal, depending what you think would work best.
- You may need to take your child's hand and hold it over yours while you scoop food and place it into your child's mouth. Remember to praise your child and reward any positive attempts to hold the utensil.
- Try using a reinforcement (something that is really motivating) to give to your child after she helps with holding the spoon. This helps to motivate a child to want to hold the spoon again, as they know they will get rewarded for their efforts. You can try using a smartie, high fives, praise, a minute of using a favourite toy or electronic device.
- When your child gets is comfortable scooping and placing one spoonful into his/her mouth, you can try 2 spoonfuls.
- Continue to praise your child for independence while slowly increasing the number of independent spoons he will have to do.

- Try using “First, Then” to get your child to take their own bites with the spoon:
“First you take 1 bite by yourself, then I will help you with the rest”
- Give your child some choice as to how many bites they will have independently:
“Do you want to do 3 bites on your own or 4 bites?” Continue to gradually increase the demand.
- It may be helpful to use a visual picture to show your child:



Or



It is important to give your child a chance to gradually work on increasing independence with eating, so allow plenty of time to build skills. Focusing on setting small, realistic goals will help you work towards the ultimate goal of having your child eat on his/her own.

Please contact your Occupational Therapist with any questions or concern