

BEGINNING FOOD EXPLORATION

MUST BE GIVEN WITH THE DEVELOPMENTAL FOOD CONTINUUM HANDOUT

If your child is just learning to eat solid table foods with texture (i.e. foods that required chewing), every time your child sits down to have a meal or snack, put at least one **puree** and one **Hard Munchable*** (see Developmental Food Continuum Handout) on his/her high chair tray (or plate on his/her placemat on the table).

- ✓ The point of the Hard Munchable is for your child to practice moving a hard solid food in his/her mouth **WITHOUT GETTING A PIECE OFF**. The goal is NOT to bite off or swallow this food! A Hard Munchable needs to be small enough to fit in the mouth, but large enough so the child can't get a bite off. It should be about the size and shape of a big, fat marker. The child can then hold one end in his/her hand and put the other end in his/her mouth. His/her hand will help the tongue learn to move the food.
- ✓ The Hard Munchable also helps to desensitize the child's tongue and move the child's gag reflex further back into the back of his/her throat. This means that your child will likely accidentally gag himself/herself during food exploration. It is your job as a parent to NOT panic! When this happens, simply look at the child and cheerfully say "Oops! You got that back too far. Push it out with your tongue". You can also gently put your hand over your child's hand to guide him/her in pulling the food forward and out of the mouth. Do NOT pull the food all the way out of your child's mouth rapidly and scare them. Move slowly and calmly.
- ✓ Allow your child to play with these foods on their tray while you are spoon feeding them (or as they are working with other foods).
- ✓ The point of putting the purees and Hard Munchables on the tray/plate is so that your child can explore and learn about the food BEFORE it gets into their mouth. This means that your child needs to get messy in order to properly explore the food.

Wearing one's food is part of the process of learning to eat it. Our rule is that during a feeding, you should only clean food off the child's face only if it is going to get into the eyes. Otherwise, save the cleaning for AFTER you remove them from the high chair.

***BECAUSE OF THE RISK POTENTIALLY ASSOCIATED WITH A HARD MUNCHABLE, NEVER GIVE THIS FOOD TEXTURE TO A CHILD WITHOUT DIRECT ADULT SUPERVISION THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE MEAL/SNACK.**