

# "Division of Responsibility" Cheat Sheet

Ellyn Satter's evidence-based feeding model that ends mealtime battles — your job vs. their job, clearly defined

Developed by Ellyn Satter, RD, and backed by decades of feeding research, the Division of Responsibility (sDOR) is the gold-standard framework for feeding children. It eliminates power struggles by clearly defining who's responsible for what. When parents do their jobs and trust children to do theirs, kids eat better, develop healthier relationships with food, and are more willing to try new things.

## The Core Framework

### Parent's Job (THE WHAT, WHEN, WHERE)

- ✓ WHAT food is offered — you choose the menu
- ✓ WHEN meals and snacks happen — you set the schedule
- ✓ WHERE eating takes place — you pick the location (table, highchair)
- ✓ Provide structured meals and sit-down snacks at predictable times
- ✓ Include a variety of foods, always with at least one "safe" food they usually eat
- ✓ Model eating the same foods yourself
- ✓ Make mealtimes pleasant — no screens, no pressure, no lectures

### Child's Job (THE WHETHER & HOW MUCH)

- ✗ WHETHER they eat at all — yes, this is their choice
- ✗ HOW MUCH they eat of what you've provided — trust their appetite regulation
- ✗ WHICH of the offered foods they eat — from the options you provided
- ✗ They get to explore food at their own pace (look, touch, smell, lick, taste)
- ✗ They decide when they're done
- ✗ They do NOT get to demand different food or eat outside scheduled times

## What This Looks Like in Practice

SITUATION	OLD WAY (PRESSURE)	SDOR WAY (TRUST)
Child won't eat dinner	"You have to eat 3 more bites before you leave the table"	"You don't have to eat it. This is what we're having. Breakfast is at 7 AM."
Child only eats bread from the plate	"Eat your chicken first, then you can have more bread"	Serve a reasonable portion of bread with the meal. When it's gone, it's gone. No restricting.

SITUATION	OLD WAY (PRESSURE)	SDOR WAY (TRUST)
Child says they're hungry 20 min after dinner	"You should have eaten your dinner!" (guilt)	"I hear you. Snack time is at [scheduled time]. You can eat then."
Child refuses vegetables every night	"No dessert until you finish your vegetables"	Keep offering vegetables on the plate with zero comment. Model eating them yourself.
Child wants only Mac & cheese forever	Stop buying Mac & cheese OR serve it every night to avoid fights	Serve Mac & cheese sometimes, as one part of a balanced meal. Include other foods alongside it.

## Structure That Makes It Work

- 1 Offer 3 meals and 2-3 snacks at roughly the same times each day — predictability builds trust
- 2 Sit-down snacks at the table (not grazing from a snack cup in the car/stroller all day)
- 3 Space eating opportunities 2-3 hours apart so real hunger develops between meals
- 4 Every meal includes at least one food you know they'll eat (bread, fruit, pasta) — this is their safety net
- 5 Serve all foods at the same time (don't hold back dessert — put it on the plate with dinner, one small serving)
- 6 Meals last 20-30 minutes. When the family is done, the kitchen closes until the next planned eating time.
- 7 No short-order cooking — one meal for the whole family. They eat from what's offered or they wait.

## Common Fears (And Why They're Unfounded)

PARENT FEAR	REALITY
"They'll starve if I don't make them eat"	Healthy children will not allow themselves to starve. Appetite self-regulation is innate unless we override it with pressure.
"They'll only eat carbs forever"	Carb preference is normal at this age. If you keep offering variety without pressure, the diet broadens naturally over months (not days).
"They need to eat at every meal"	Toddler appetites are wildly variable. They may eat almost nothing at lunch and then demolish dinner. Look at intake over a week, not a single meal.
"Dessert on the plate? They'll only eat that!"	Serve one child-sized portion. Surprisingly, when dessert isn't restricted, it loses its power. They eat it and move on to other food.

PARENT FEAR	REALITY
"I was raised to clean my plate and I'm fine"	The "clean plate club" overrides internal hunger/fullness cues and is linked to higher obesity risk. Appetite regulation is a skill worth protecting.

The hardest part is doing your job and NOT doing theirs. You'll want to say "just try it." You'll want to celebrate when they eat vegetables. Resist. Neutrality is the goal. Food is not a performance.

#### IMPORTANT

When to seek help: If your child eats fewer than 20 foods total and the number is shrinking (not growing), if they gag or vomit on textures, or if they have significant weight faltering — talk to your pediatrician about a feeding evaluation. Some picky eating goes beyond normal neophobia into ARFID (Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) and needs specialized support.