

*Imagine you are in preschool, it's lunchtime, and you're hungry. You are able to get your lunchbox from your cubby all by yourself, and that feels great! You carry it to the table and sit down. But you can't open your lunchbox alone, and neither can 6 of your friends. Your teachers are patiently working their way around the room to help, so you wait. You are not good at waiting... yet. Finally a teacher is there to talk you through the steps of lifting the latch, helps you hold the bottom, and finally lifting the lid. The table around you gets crowded as you start to unpack your 5 small containers of food. One container falls on the floor and rolls under the table. You look up to your teacher who, as a way of helping you feel confident, capable, and responsible, asks you to go and retrieve it, which you happily do. It's been 5 minutes since the start of lunchtime. Back at your seat, you finish unpacking and look at your many containers. You try to open one, but you can't. Neither can 5 of your friends. One teacher is helping to open containers, another has gone to retrieve spoons and forks for other children, and yet another is helping one friend in the bathroom, so no one is here to help you right now. You are very hungry, so you try to open another container. You pull and pull and suddenly the top flies off and your rice and peas are all over the table, floor, and even in your hair! Ten minutes have passed, and you still haven't eaten anything...*

## Lunch At School!

Eating lunch at school is yet another big step towards independence. Typically, it takes a few days for children to become accustomed to eating lunch in this setting. As with all things, we encourage children to be very independent with their lunch, and let them choose which foods to eat in which order (so you can be sure that the cookies will be gone first!). Children are given plenty of time to eat, but are never required to finish everything in their lunchbox if they are not hungry.

Here are several recommendations that can help your child find success when eating lunch at school:

- Limit lunch selections to 3-4 food items plus a drink. Too many choices can be overwhelming (especially for 2's!) and they end up not eating much at all.
- Look for lunch boxes and containers that your child can open and close independently. Feel free to practice these skills before school starts.
- Small spill-proof bottles/sippy cups are easiest for children, followed by juice boxes. Please don't send in wide-mouth bottles or water with screw caps!
- **NO CANDY OR GLASS CONTAINERS.**
- Be aware of choking hazards! Cut up grapes, cherry tomatoes, hot dogs, etc into non-round shapes. Even soft bread can overwhelm a little mouth. Lunchtime is very social at school, and children are often talking and laughing as we eat!

Below are some ideas of what to pack (and what to avoid!):

| <b>YES!</b>                                                                                         | <b>NO!</b>                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sandwiches: Peanut butter and jelly, hummus and cheese, cream cheese and jam, avocado and cheese... | Soup                                                                                          |
| Pasta /macaroni and cheese                                                                          | Rice or couscous                                                                              |
| Hummus and crackers/baby carrots                                                                    | Peas                                                                                          |
| Hard Boiled Eggs (peeled, please!)                                                                  | Thin yogurt in shallow containers                                                             |
| Washed, sliced, peeled, pitted/seeded fruits and veggies (i.e. ready to eat!)                       | <i>Unusual choking hazards: popcorn, celery, grapes, cherry tomatoes, hotdogs, soft bread</i> |
| Cheese Sticks or cubes                                                                              |                                                                                               |
| Thick non-spilling yogurt                                                                           |                                                                                               |
| Fruit puree pouches                                                                                 |                                                                                               |
| Quesadilla, sushi,                                                                                  |                                                                                               |
| Crackers, cold cuts                                                                                 |                                                                                               |