

ChildFriendly Lunch & Learn Resource

Quick Interpretation Guide for Mealtime Observations

This tool helps educators move beyond “what happened” to understanding “why it might be happening”—so documentation in ChildFriendly Pro becomes more meaningful, professional, and useful for families.

Important Note for Educators

This guide is intended to support observation and reflection only. Educators are not diagnosing, labeling, or assessing medical or developmental conditions. The goal is to:

- Better understand children’s behaviours
- Respond in a supportive, respectful way
- Communicate clear, objective observations with families

If ongoing concerns arise, these observations can help inform respectful conversations with families or appropriate professionals.

Common Mealtime Behaviours → What They May Mean

1. Refuses Mixed or Combined Foods

- What you might see:
- Won’t eat casseroles, stews, sandwiches
- Picks foods apart or only eats one component

What it may mean:

- Texture sensitivity
- Difficulty with unpredictability (foods touching/mixed)
- Sensory processing differences

What to document in ChildFriendly Pro:

- “Preferred foods served separately—engaged more when items were not mixed”

2. Eats Only Specific Foods (e.g., carbs, beige foods)

What you might see:

- Eats bread, crackers, pasta—but avoids vegetables/proteins

What it may mean:

- Seeking regulation (carbs can be calming)
- Sensory comfort with predictable textures
- Early stage of food exposure

What to document:

- "Selected familiar foods (bread/pasta), declined new items—remained regulated throughout meal"

3. Gagging, Spitting Out, or Strong Reactions

What you might see:

- Gags on certain textures
- Spits food out immediately
- Strong facial reactions

What it may mean:

- Sensory overload (not defiance)
- Oral-motor sensitivity
- Anxiety around unfamiliar foods

What to document:

- "Demonstrated strong sensory response to texture—offered alternative and remained calm"

4. Eats Very Quickly or Large Quantities

What you might see:

- Finishes meals much faster than peers
- Requests multiple servings quickly

What it may mean:

- Regulation need
- Routine-based eating patterns
- Hunger cues not yet regulated

What to document:

- "Ate quickly and requested additional portions—remained engaged and regulated after eating"

5. Refuses to Eat at All

What you might see:

- Pushes plate away
- Says "no" to all food

What it may mean:

- Not hungry
- Overstimulated environment
- Need for control/autonomy
- Fatigue or emotional state

What to document:

- "Chose not to eat—remained at table and engaged socially with peers"

6. Plays With Food Instead of Eating

What you might see:

- Touching, squishing, smelling food
- Minimal actual eating

What it may mean:

- Learning and exploring
- Building comfort with new foods
- Sensory curiosity

What to document:

- "Explored food through touch and smell—building familiarity"

7. Emotional or Dysregulated at Mealtime

What you might see:

- Crying, leaving table, refusing to sit
- Escalation when food is presented

What it may mean:

- Overstimulation
- Sensory overwhelm
- Association between food and stress/pressure

What to document:

- "Required support to regulate—returned to table once environment was adjusted"