

Eating out with Kids ... can be fun!

I recently read an interview with a mom who talked about her favourite restaurants, but when asked which of them she would take her kids out to, said none! How unfortunate. These days with busy schedules and limited time to always make supper at home, it is inevitable that many families eat out. In our case, it is at least once weekly with our four year old, and this never includes the typical 'kid friendly' fast food places.

Our daughter went out to a restaurant for the first time when she was 7 days old, albeit she slept through most of our time there! Through the years however, she has been to some of our favourite restaurants both in Vancouver and when travelling. She is a regular at Osamu Sushi, Shijo, La Villeta, Bacci, Bacchus, Mahek's, The Cannery, Hart House and Vij's! Definitely, not your everyday 'kid' places to eat at. How do we do this, and find ourselves welcomed back at these restaurants? Here are our ten tips based on what works for us:

1. We always eat supper together at home. So when eating out, we eat together too. Of course we occasionally go out just as a couple, but more frequently, we eat out as a family.
2. Supper at home is usually at around 6 or 6:30, so reservations at restaurants are usually at around the same time.
3. Even the best of children will not be willing to sit for a long time. So, we order meals soon after getting seated and ask for the bill soon after finishing so that we're not sitting around for extended periods of time.
4. While supper is being prepared at home, one of us will play with our daughter. When going out, after food has been ordered and before it arrives, one of us will often go for a little walk with her just around the restaurant, or at Vij's to the little fish pond outside.
5. At home we all sit down and then start having our supper together. So at restaurants, we make sure that our food arrives together. When she was an infant, we would pack her meal from home and ask the restaurant staff to warm it when bringing out our food.
6. A booster seat or high chair is no longer necessary. However, when it was, we took our own that could be strapped onto a restaurant chair.

- We found that restaurants did not always have a child seat, what they had was already in use, or on occasion we thought ours was safer!
7. We pick restaurants that we know she will like food at so Japanese, Indian and Italian are perennial favourites.
 8. We have rules at home such as using cutlery, no blowing bubbles in the water glass, no eating with your mouth open, asking to be excused when finished, etc. These same rules apply when going out.
 9. We don't drink pop at home so no pop at the restaurant either so less chance of having a child who has a sugar high on an otherwise empty stomach.
 10. As a backup, we usually have some art supplies and books in a little red suitcase that we carry in the car. At least I think it's still there, we haven't used it in a long time!

For additional resources, here are some great websites:

<http://ww1.babyzone.com/parenting/mom2mom/default.asp?CatID=71>

<http://parentcenter.babycenter.com/refcap/preschooler/ptravel/63913.html>

http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/parenting_tips/eating_out.html

We love eating out with our little one and hope you have fun eating out with your little ones too - bon appetit!

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