

HANDOUT: ADAPTIVE FEEDING TOOLS

[MODULE 6: Strategies to Address Feeding Difficulties for Children with Disabilities]

When a child has feeding difficulties or delayed feeding skills, there are many ways to make mealtimes safe and efficient and to help the child build skills.

Specialty equipment or tools can be a valuable way to provide additional support to a child with feeding difficulties so they can participate in mealtime or build independence with feeding themselves. Adaptive feeding tools should facilitate eating as independently as possible.

Adaptive technology refers to special versions of already existing technology or tools that allow one to perform tasks with greater ease or independence. Adaptive feeding tools are one type of assistive technology.

Adaptive Tool	Purpose	For Whom
Curved spoon 	Easier to deliver food to the mouth without spilling	For a child who has some, but limited, ability to move the arm to bring food toward the mouth
Utensil with large handle 	Easier to hold	For a child who does not have a strong enough grip to hold a typical utensil
Utensil holder or strap 	Attaches utensil to the hand so it is not easily dropped	For a child with limited or no strength to hold a utensil
Cup with lid 	Prevents spilling	For a child who spills while lifting the cup to the mouth or who overfills the mouth

Cut-out cup



Easier to tilt cup for a sip and encourages neutral head position for drinking

For a child who frequently tilts the head back to drink or with limited ability to raise arms to lift cup

Cup with handle(s)



Easier to hold

For a child who does not have a strong grip to hold a cup

Non-slip pad or mat



Prevent dish from sliding during self-feeding

For a child who has difficulty using both hands, one to hold the dish and the other to scoop the food

Adaptive bowls or plates



Prevent food from falling out of container or off spoon while scooping

For a child with difficulty scooping food onto utensils

Creative solutions: In some places specialty tools and equipment can be difficult to find or too expensive. Understanding the purpose of the adaptive tools may help you come up with creative ways to modify the tools you do have. For example:

- Build up the handle of a spoon using foam tubing, strips of fabric, tape, or other materials.
- Create a cut-out cup by cutting a disposable cup with scissors.
- Use a rubber band or hair tie as a strap to attach a utensil to a child's hand. Make sure the band is not too small so that it fits comfortably on the child's hand.