

Raising Expert Eaters: A Child Feeding Nutrition Education Intervention



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Introduction

Ellyn Satter, child feeding expert, has developed the gold standard for child feeding and has outlined it as the Division of Responsibility. The Division of Responsibility is considered the best practice by a significant portion of clinicians and professional organizations, including the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, American Academy of Pediatrics, Head Start, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children, and the United States Department for Agriculture and Nutrition Services (Loth Nogueira de Brito, Neumark-Sztainer, Orlet Fisher, & Berge, 2018). The Division of Responsibility states that parents determine *when, where, and what* a child will eat; while the child determines *whether* they eat and *how much* they eat (Satter, 2018). Although the Division of Responsibility is the gold standard for child feeding, most parents have not been using these tactics at home (Loth et al., 2018), which suggests a need for child feeding programs.

Purpose

To assess whether YMCA parents are following the Division of Responsibility when feeding their children and, ultimately, determine if there is a need for child feeding education at the YMCA.



Materials and Methods

Participants

- Parents of children enrolled in a local YMCA child care program
- Inclusion criteria:
 - Agreement to participate
 - 18 years of age or older
 - Member of a local YMCA child care program
 - Have at least one child enrolled in a local YMCA child care program

Survey

- Constructed using Qualtrics Survey Software
- Consisted of:
 - Consent form
 - Verification of age
 - 17 assessment questions:
 - Four free text responses (e.g., When it comes to child feeding, what is your biggest challenge?)
 - Two scaling questions (e.g., How concerned are you with your child's eating habits on a scale from 0-10? Here 0 represented *no concern* and 10 represented *extremely concerned*)
 - Two true/false responses (e.g., I encourage my child to eat more or less.)
 - Nine choose all that apply statements (e.g., Which topics are of most interest to you?)

Procedures

- Approved by the Concordia College Institutional Review Board
- Distributed to approximately 700 parents via the YMCA electronic parent communication outlet, ProCare
- Remained open for 14 days

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Results: Child Feeding Practices

Final Sample

- 242 parents responded; 24 were excluded due to incomplete surveys, N = 218
- Mean number of children for participants = 1.7

Confidence in Child Feeding

- *Very confident or confident* 68% (n = 146)
- *Somewhat confident, unsure, or I'm just winging it* 31% (n = 68) (See **Figure 1**)

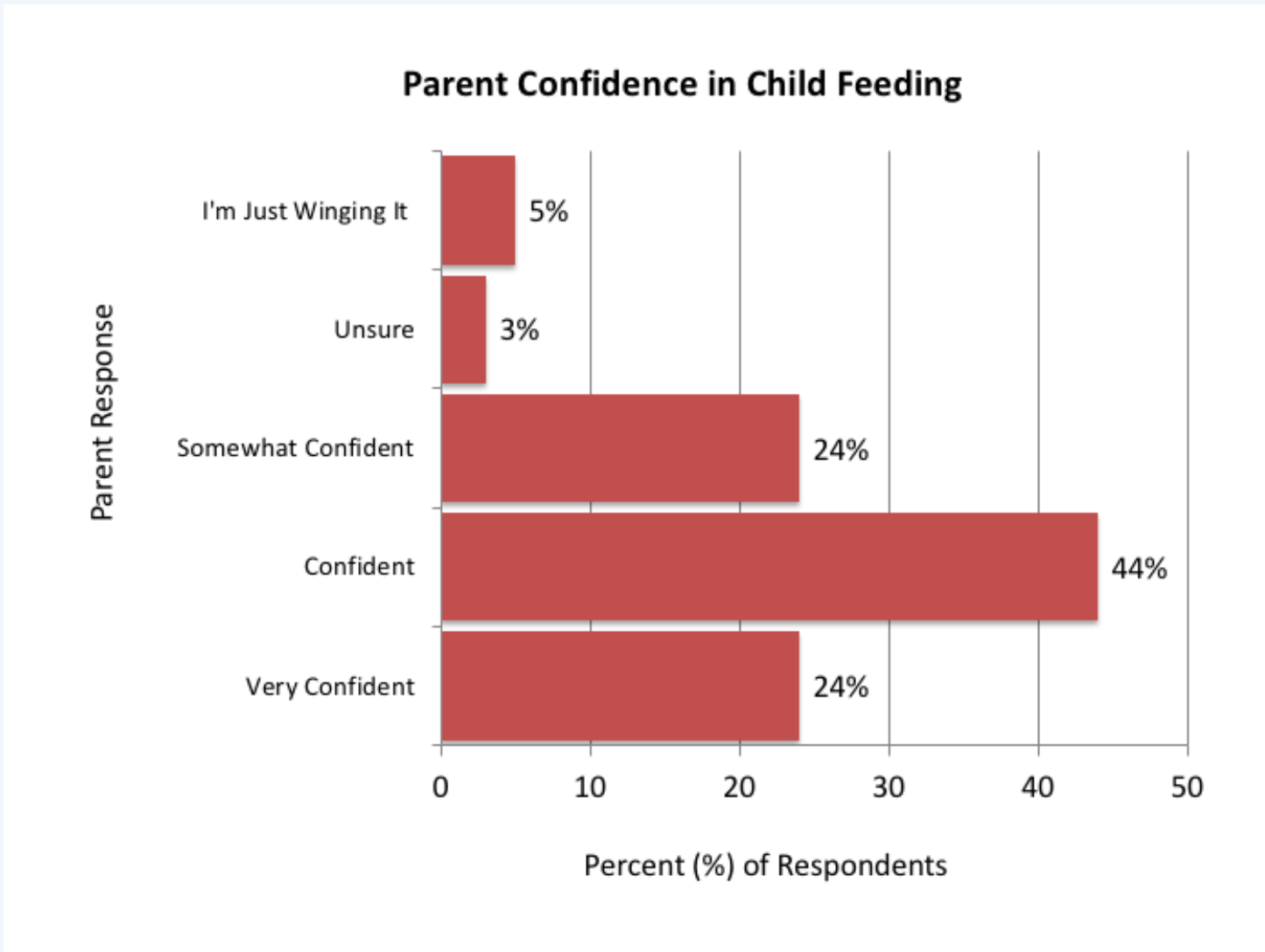


Figure 1. The response of parents regarding confidence in their current child feeding practices.

Child Feeding Concerns

Concerned with child's eating habits (0-10 scale; 0 being *not concerned at all*, and 10 being *extremely concerned*):

- Between zero and five 73% (n = 117)
- Between six and ten 26% (n = 77)

Child Feeding Challenges

Specific challenges regarding child feeding:

- Variety
- Fruit and vegetable intake
- Structured meals and snacks
- Picky eating

The Division of Responsibility

Encourage child to eat more or less:

- *True* 67% (n = 143)

Allow child to eat whenever they want:

- *True* 22% (n = 49)

When asked to state how many family meals they have together, the average response was 5.9 family meals per week (See **Figure 2**).

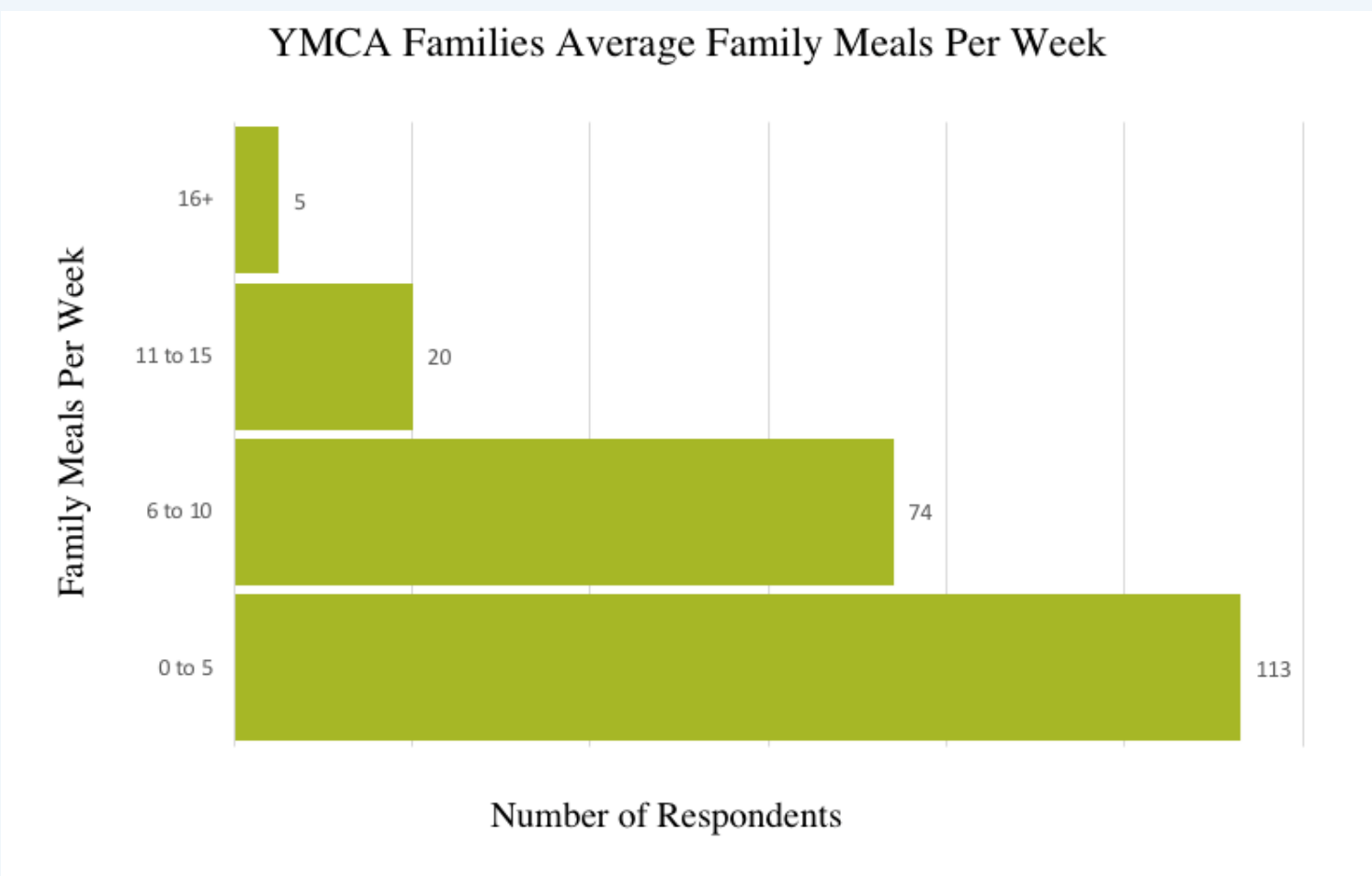


Figure 2. Parent response to the survey question, "On average, how many family meals (at the table with no TV) does your family have per week?"

Results: Program Preferences

Topic Preferences

Top three topic choices:

- Variety
- Picky eating
- Meal planning (See **Figure 3**)

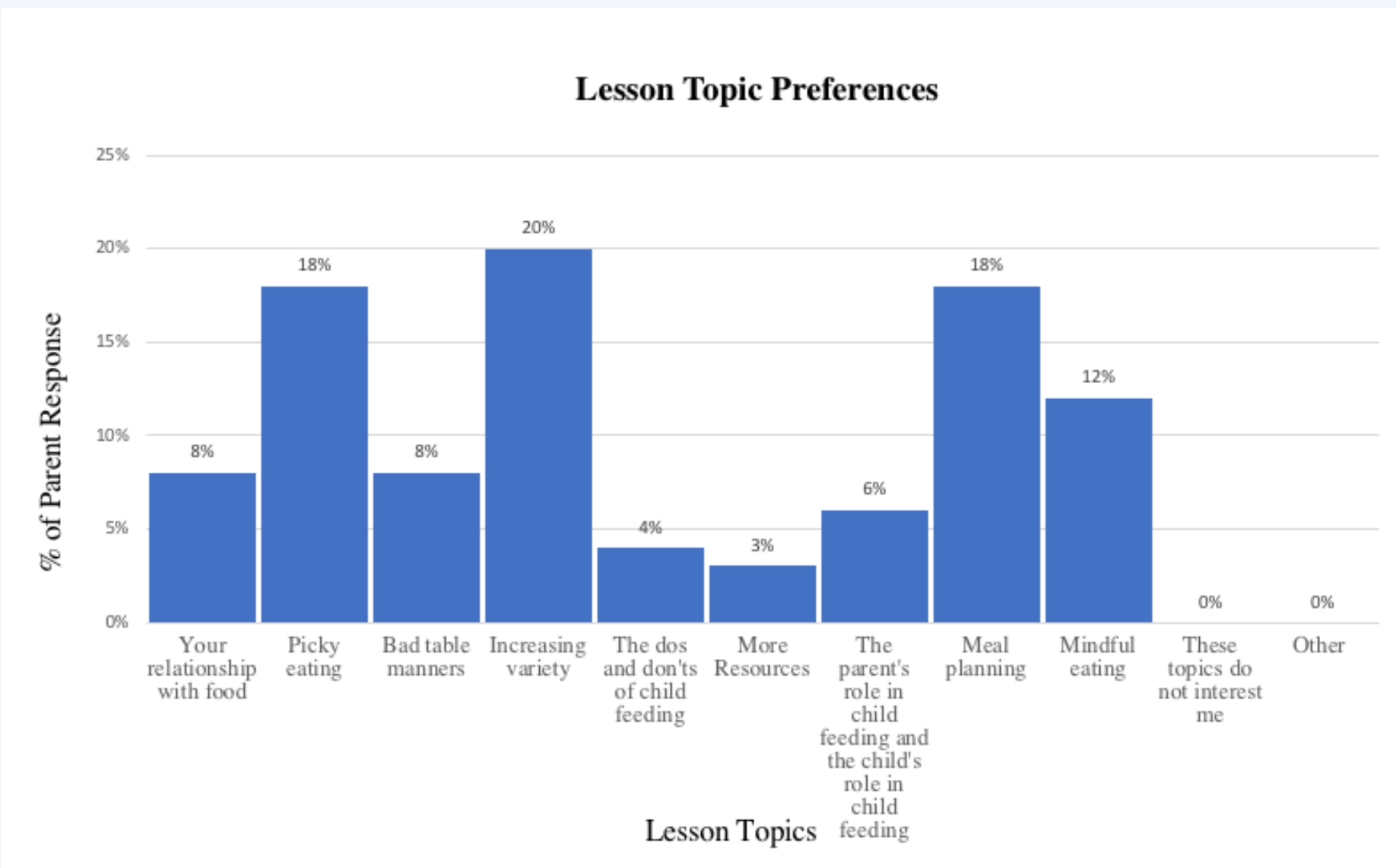


Figure 3. Parent response to the question "Which topics are of most interest to you (Choose all that apply)?"

Lesson Structure Preferences

Lesson length:

- 30-minute lessons 64% (n = 125)
- 45-60 minute lessons 36% (n = 71)
- 90-minute lessons 0% (n = 0)

Time of day:

- Weekday (Monday-Friday) evenings 58% (n = 112)
- Weekday (Monday-Friday) mornings 8% (n = 15)
- Weekday (Monday-Friday) afternoons 6% (n = 11)
- Weekend (Saturday and Sunday) mornings 13% (n = 25)
- Weekend (Saturday and Sunday) afternoons 11% (n = 21)
- Weekend (Saturday and Sunday) evenings 5% (n = 10)

YMCA location:

- Fercho location 22% (n = 43)
- Schlossman location 39% (n = 76)
- Location was not a concern 38% (n = 74)

Number of lessons:

- Three lessons 68% (n = 130)
- Four or five lessons 29% (n = 56)
- Six, seven, or eight lessons 3% (n = 6)

Lesson type:

- Group sessions guided by PowerPoint 25% (n = 88)
- Group discussion 16% (n = 58)
- Webinar series 26% (n = 112)
- Informative articles in a newsletter 27% (n = 96)
- Individual sessions 6% (n = 22)

Barriers to attending lessons:

- Time 40% (n = 140)
- Disinterest 3% (n = 8)

Discussion

Although parents primarily reported confidence in their child feeding practices, there appeared to be an evident need for child feeding education. For example, the majority of parents surveyed indicated they encourage their children to eat more or less, a practice that goes against the Division of Responsibility and has shown to produce negative outcomes such as picky eating (van der Horst, 2012).

Parents reported challenges as being picky eating and increasing variety in their child's diet. The research shows that these two challenges often subside when parents avoid coercive feeding tactics such as encouraging children to eat more or less (Satter, 2018). This demonstrates a gap between parent knowledge around child feeding tactics and provides evidence for a child feeding nutrition education program.

The majority of parents expressed interest in a child feeding nutrition education program consisting of three, 30-minute lessons on weekday nights at any YMCA location. Further, respondents had the highest interest in group sessions guided by PowerPoint and a webinar series.



Conclusion

Overall, there appeared to be a disconnect between parent confidence in child feeding and adherence to the Division of Responsibility. This alone demonstrates the need for a child feeding nutrition education program at the YMCA. The requests from YMCA parents regarding lesson structure will be incorporated into the development of these classes; however, evidence of effective nutrition education programs will predominantly guide development of the program.

References

Loth, K., Nogueira de Brito, J., Neumark-Sztainer, D., Orlet Fisher, J., & Berge, J. (2018). A qualitative exploration into the parent-child feeding relationship: How parents of preschoolers divide their responsibility of feeding with children. *Journal of Nutrition Education Behavior*, 50(7), 655-667. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2018.03.004>

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