SPOT’s Feeding Program: Intensive Mealtime Therapy for Families with Picky Eaters

“Working Together To Achieve Outstanding Results”

**SPOT’s Feeding Program**, uses a developmental approach to eating disorders. We tailor and customize the program to meet each child’s needs and abilities. Our multidisciplinary approach involves the child, parents, pediatrician, Speech-Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist and Nutritionist (if needed).

Each program lasts for 6 weeks and includes 3 sessions per week for the child and 2 sessions per week for the parent. The child participates in 1 group mealtime session per week and 2 individual sessions with speech therapists using All in 1 S.P.O.T.’s unique step-by-step feeding program, the S.P.O.T. Feeding Hierarchy. Parents spend one session a week learning specific techniques and getting coached from one of the creators of the program. During the second weekly session parents learn how to prepare, easy, healthy meals and snacks for their child.

**Individual sessions** (three times a week for an hour) - Speech therapists with a Master’s Degree in Speech-Language Pathology will take individual children through All in 1 S.P.O.T.’s unique step-by-step program the S.P.O.T. Feeding Hierarchy. Dr. Irene Gioules and Maria Panayiotou, founders of the S.P.O.T. Feeding Hierarchy will train and supervise all therapists using the program. Here’s how the S.P.O.T. Feeding Hierarchy works:

**Stage 1: Food Education**

Therapists include the child as a part of his or her treatment team. We discuss different foods from all the food categories, where they come from, how they are made, and how they help our bodies to grow. Children learn the importance of nutrition based food selection.

**Stage 2: Food Exposure**

Therapists select specific foods based on the child’s interests and needs and help the child learn to explore these new foods in a way that feels safe. What does the new “target” food feel like, taste like, look like?

**Stage 3: Food Interaction**

As the child feels increasingly comfortable exploring the target foods through play, focus shifts to gradually increasing the child’s ability to tolerate touching the food with his or her hands and face.
Stage 4: Food Tasting and Trials
During this stage the child gradually begins placing the target food in and around his mouth until comfortable biting, chewing, and swallowing the food.

Stage 5: Food Enjoyment
This stage focuses on having the child accept the target foods at home and in school

While the child participates in the group or individual feeding sessions, parents attend coaching and cooking sessions with one of the Speech-Language Pathologists who created the program. Their six week coaching style program empowers parents to take charge of creating the changes they want to see in their child, themselves and their family. Parents participate in a one hour educational lecture and a one hour cooking lesson per week.

Parents will learn how to:
- Develop a customized food expansion map to introduce “healthy” foods their child ENJOYS eating
- Incorporate sensory integration to overcome food aversions
- Provide stress reduction through therapeutic play
- Increase confidence in their parenting skills

Week 1 - Overview of the program
- Define eating competence and a healthy feeding dynamic.
- Determine origins of “picky eating and problem feeding,” including gastrointestinal, sensory, & oral-motor issues

Week 2 – Nutrition basics & social considerations for “picky eating”
- How family values, classroom cultures, and cultural media affect a child’s food choices.
- How to use a food journal.
- Taking control over the “when” of mealtimes.

Week 3 – Getting from preferred foods to healthy foods
- Using sensory preferences to make a chaining map from your child’s favorite foods to healthier choices.
- Planning a daily “focused snack”
- Setting limits & using rewards to have fun with food exploration

Week 4 – The benefits of planning a menu
- Exploring the benefits of menu planning
- Making up a menu plan
- How to have fun with food away from the table

Week 5 - Recognizing food sensitivities & adding new foods to the whole family’s menu
- Common food sensitivities and how to find them
- How to add new foods to family dinners and still enjoy the meal
- Understanding the importance of showing your child how to safely explore new foods.

Week 6 - Surviving holiday meals
- How to decrease anxiety and make a plan to enjoy holiday meals
- Cooking with your child
- Making future plans & referrals for more work (if needed)
Each Program runs for 6 weeks at a time and includes the following:
- One hour session per week of parent training
- Three times a week for an hour individual mealtime sessions for child
- 2 Home Visits by one of Speech-Language Pathologists who developed the program

Common types of feeding disorders in children include:
- Adipsia (absence of thirst or the desire to drink)
- Dysphagia (real or imagined difficulty in swallowing)
- Food refusal
- Inability to self-feed
- Taking too long to eat
- Choking, gagging, or vomiting when eating
- Inappropriate mealtime behavior (throwing tantrums at mealtimes)
- Picky eating according to food type and texture
- Oral motor and sensory problems

Inappropriate mealtime behaviors:
- covering eyes/ears
- crying
- anxiety
- distractions
- decreased eye contact
- withdrawn
- gagging
- food refusals
- lengthy meal times
- inattentive
- poor posture
- hyperactive

Children with feeding disorders may also present with the following conditions:
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease
- Gastrointestinal motility disorders
- Palate defects
- Failure to thrive
- Prematurity
- Oral motor dysfunction
- Esophagitis
- Gastritis
- Duodenitis
- Food allergies
- Delayed exposure to a variety of foods
- Behavior management issues
- Short Gut Syndrome

Dr. Irene Christoforou-Gioules, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, the founder of TheraTalk Speech-Language Pathology, P.C., has been in practice since 1999. Dr. Gioules received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from St. John’s University and her doctoral/Ph.D. degree from Columbia University. Given that Dr. Gioules’ education
surpasses the requirements for becoming a speech language pathologist, she has enlightened her staff with the most effective treatment programs for various speech/language disabilities. Dr. Gioules has treated over hundreds of children and has trained over 20 speech therapists. Dr. Gioules guides her therapists to offer many of the innovative treatments and new technology that are endorsed by research. Dr. Gioules has substantial experience with dysphagia (swallowing disorder), feeding deficits, motor speech disorders (apraxia, dysarthria) and speech/language delays/disorders.

Maria Panayiotou-Mamounas, M.A., CCC-SLP, co-director of All in 1 SPOT with TheraTalk, received her bachelor’s degree from New York University, and her master’s degree from St. John’s University. Maria has supervised over 10 clinical fellows. Maria works closely with pediatricians, neurologists, psychologists, occupational and physical therapists to provide a multidisciplinary approach to treatment. Maria is a PROMPT trained and LSVT certified therapist with experience in behavioral feeding, apraxia, speech/language delays, developmental/neurological disorders, Parkinson’s Disease and autism. Maria frequently provides training to her staff on augmentative/alternative communication devices, behavioral feeding and other various speech and language disabilities. Maria provides in-services and training to medical colleagues and is the supervisor of speech at various affiliated schools.