# COLLECTION OF SUPPORTING MATERIALS

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This document contains support materials for family members and professionals to work on situations similar to those described in the book “Exquisitely Maria”. This material includes information on strategies and techniques, guidelines, social stories and pictograms, among others.

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## 1. STRATEGIES FOR TACTILE STIMULATION

Here are some activities that can be done to achieve a greater acceptance of tactile stimuli.

- During or after the bath
    - Take advantage of the bath to pass different sponges, softer or rougher.
    - Try to dry with towels with different textures. It is interesting to dry the child by making small touches with a little pressure, instead of rubbing.
    - Add hair styling and drying strategies at this time.
    - After the bath, perform a relaxing massage, if tolerated. Preferably performing light pressure in the movements, avoiding tickling initially.
- At mealtime
    - Make simple recipes with dough, jelly, minced meat, bechamel, egg, fruit or spreads; for example, pizza dough, bread, cookies, meatballs, croquettes, dumplings, fruit skewers, sandwiches, ....
    - Allow small moments of experimentation with food: eating with your hands, making imaginary recipes by mixing foods, etc.
- At playtime
    - Hide small toys in a container with rice, noodles, lentils or similar, and look for them. If the container is large, it will also allow us to put our feet in it. Another option is to use a removable paddling pool, which allows us to experiment with the whole body.
    - Play at painting with shaving foam or finger paint, both with hands and feet, or paint the body. There are textured paints available on the market, or you can create them yourself by adding skin-safe products to the paint, such as sand, sawdust, salt, etc., always under supervision. Another option is to use brushes or sponges with different textures to apply the paint. Play with playdough, kinetic sand, slime, modeling paste, clay, porexpan ball plasticine, or different similar options that exist in the market. Each of these elements provides a novel texture and the possibility of experimenting with them and relating these textures to fun moments. In addition, you can find many tutorials on how to create some of these materials, so it can be a very fun family game moment in which the child is more involved and generates greater exposure to textures and favors the acceptance of the final product.
    - Create a texture panel and put different textures with which the child is familiar, for example: cotton, scouring pad, cloth, mesh, foam rubber, aluminum, sandpaper, cardboard,.... You can play at touching the

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different textures, both with hands and feet, and describe them. In this way you also encourage the learning of basic concepts.

- Create a sack or bag in which you introduce different textures, along with objects, and play at guessing which object it is, before taking it out of the bag.

- In the park
    - Play with sand, mud, grass, leaves and other natural elements that we can find in this context.
    - There are balls with different textures, which can be interesting to play with.

AT A GENERAL LEVEL

- If you observe that the child is altered, you can perform some activity that involves some force or pressure, such as jumping or running.
- It is important NOT to force the child to perform the proposed activities, everything must be progressive and respecting the times and tolerances of the children.

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## 2. MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR THE COMPANION

The adult present with the child during mealtimes plays an important role in the process. If we consider certain aspects, anticipate potential challenges, and have a set of tools ready, we can manage any difficulties that may arise in a safe and supportive manner. Below are strategies for supporting the child through this challenge.

Firstly, it is important for the child to become familiar with the tools used for eating in a conscious way. Reducing unnecessary stimuli that are not part of the task is also essential to help the child stay focused.

Informing the family about the child's specific characteristics helps the child relax and feel more secure when the guidelines are followed. Sharing this information makes the situation more manageable and, by giving the child choices, such as between two utensils, learning how the food was prepared, or picking their seat at the table, we create a more welcoming and positive atmosphere.

To help the child understand the process more easily and visually, we can prepare a social story. This involves describing the entire activity concretely, using pictograms, and introducing it well before the meal begins. For instance, we can choose a specific time of day to show and explain what will happen. If the child knows what to expect at each step, they will feel much more relaxed.

We can also provide instructions to guide the child through stressful situations. An example might be, "If Maria feels nervous while being fed, she can hold Mummy's hand," or, "If Maria feels nervous when bringing the spoon to her mouth or after tasting something, she can say STOP."

Introducing new foods should be a gradual process, allowing the child to set the pace. If we notice that the child is uncomfortable, we should reduce the demands. For example, if Maria sticks out her tongue to taste the texture of a food but becomes nervous because she finds it unpleasant, we can continue with this approach until Maria feels ready to take a small bite. Once she is comfortable putting the food in her mouth, we can move on to the next step, always paying attention to her emotions.

Having various strategies and materials available is essential. One way to help the child feel calmer is by allowing them to bring a favourite toy to the table. Before sitting down to eat, we can help the child feel more secure by suggesting they bring a comforting object, such as a soft toy or doll. "Maria, if you like, you can bring a toy you love to keep near your plate."

We should also anticipate behaviours that could hinder progress. By recognising signs of stress, nervousness, frustration, or discomfort, we can prevent many challenging situations. If we see the child becoming restless, we can validate their feelings and offer alternatives. For example, "Maria, you're moving around a lot in your chair. Would you like to take a break?"

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As a general rule, it is important to communicate with the child in a clear, precise, and calm manner, using short sentences and concrete terms. Employ positive language, maintain a calm tone with minimal gesticulation, and ensure the environment is as quiet as possible. Speak at the child's level, make eye contact, and ensure they understand what is happening. Adapt to their processing pace, allowing them time to respond. Validate their emotions by showing understanding of their anger, fear, or other feelings, accompanying them, naming what they are experiencing, and staying by their side.

Include the child in the process of finding solutions, offering them options and allowing them to choose one.

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## 3. WITHDRAWAL OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES AT MEALTIME

As seen in the story, Maria has difficulty eating in contexts other than the one her mothers have taught her, which involves watching cartoons on her mobile phone, with the food she likes, and always following the same routine.

But how have they managed to reduce her habit of looking at the electronic screen?

To address these situations, it is important for families to understand the disadvantages and risks of giving children such devices to avoid conflicts, control their restless behaviour, or try to get them to “relax”.

All these motivations are unrealistic and may help in the immediate moment when we want the child to eat, but not in the short term or over time. In fact, using this seemingly quick and effective strategy can lead to difficulties in adapting to new situations (disruptive behaviour), deterioration in the quality of social relationships, or a lack of interest in slower and more educational activities.

Mealtimes provide an opportunity to interact with family and friends—a moment to step away from the rush of everyday life and focus on the present.

For this reason, setting the table, sitting down together to eat, and communicating in any way we can, can create a space that enhances quality of life and offers enriching learning for everyone.

In the case of children, engaging in these kinds of rituals improves the quality of their social interactions, helps them become more aware of their preferences, and allows them to better process the sensory information they experience when food enters their mouth.

If you have exposed your child to these devices and they show uncooperative or angry behaviour when eating without them, here are some guidelines to help:

Natural withdrawal

We often think that removing stimuli that have always been present will cause problems, but sometimes it is this fear that makes the process more difficult. Therefore, we should initially try to introduce the food situation without the device, and if tantrums or uncooperative behaviour arise, we wait for the child to adapt. It may take some time, as they have always had a screen capturing their attention during mealtimes. In the meantime, we can use the following two strategies in parallel, if necessary.

Anticipation

If the child does not yet understand time concepts such as "now," "next," or "first," use pictures to help anticipate mealtime (by showing them the picture just before sitting down) and the activities that will take place before and after the meal. This will help

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the child place the meal in time, giving it a clear beginning and end. It will also help them understand that they cannot have the tablet at this time, but may be allowed to use it at another time during the day.

Temporary substitution with manipulative material

If, after following the previous guidelines, the child still refuses to eat, we can substitute the device with other stimuli that require interaction, communication, and engagement with an adult. These can include storytelling, association games, or turn-based activities where we turn pages, hand out pieces, or tokens after eating a certain number of spoonfuls. Additionally, we should avoid obsessive games and aim to keep the materials neutral—not too interesting or too dull for the child.

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## 4. STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS INSECURITY

Maria is a girl who is very accustomed to eating under specific circumstances and conditions. As we see in the story, Maria does not want to eat in places where she has not eaten before, without her special animal plate, or without her cartoons that entertain her so much. To address this situation and help Maria adapt to changes, we must incorporate strategies that provide her with a sense of security, allowing learning to take place meaningfully, with self-confidence as an essential component.

All children can feel insecure about certain activities, so it is important to praise small accomplishments as they occur. "Maria, you ate the first spoonful, and you did great!" This can help Maria build confidence. Avoid criticising or focusing on negative behaviours: "Maria, I noticed you were very nervous when I brought the spoon to your mouth," or, "Maria, you didn't want to eat again." If we want Maria to trust herself, we must convey that we trust her.

We should give her age-appropriate responsibilities and set challenges that are achievable. Maria is young and may need at least a little help at times. A gesture of affection can make her feel more secure and show her that she is not facing this challenge alone. "Maria, if you feel scared, you can hold Mummy's hand; she is here with you." While encouraging her autonomy, we must acknowledge that she may need our assistance and support frequently.

Maria is unlikely to meet all the challenges on her first attempt, so it's important to minimise the impact of failures. Children need to experience failure and learn to tolerate frustration in situations or games that don't always go as planned, but we should also frame it as a challenge. "Maria, today we ate a few spoonfuls without cartoons—how about tomorrow we try to eat a few more?" You could even ask her for suggestions on how to improve: "Maria, what could we do tomorrow to eat a few more spoonfuls?"

In another section, we discuss games in more detail, but it's useful to keep in mind that these strategies can be applied while playing with the child at home. We can also teach children to laugh at themselves, which can boost their self-esteem. Dance, play, jump, laugh, and dress up—teach them to have fun, which can help reduce their rigidity in new situations with others.

Lastly, both adults and children tend to use negative language when faced with failure. Negative thinking and self-reinforcement can be retrained, allowing us to give ourselves positive messages. We can start by changing or modelling phrases like, "I didn't manage to finish my plate," to, "I gave it a try," or replacing, "I can't," with, "What if I try?"

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## 5. GUIDELINES FOR ROLE-PLAYING

Role-playing is very important for children, as it helps them learn and anticipate real-life situations. To encourage their participation in these games, and help them with situations like eating out or trying new foods , we can use the following strategies.

It is preferable to begin the game with external elements, such as toys, especially when we aim to increase the child's comfort with social situations they find unpleasant. Once the child is familiar with the dynamics of the game and can anticipate situations where they may feel uncomfortable, we can introduce role-playing where they become the main participant.

The presentation of toys or game elements is crucial. We need to ensure that the child is familiar with some of these items and can use them functionally. For example, when playing a restaurant game with dolls, ensure that the child knows about the food, cutlery, and utensils, and understands how to feed the doll. If they do not, we will start with these tasks before progressing to more complex games.

When playing with real people, it is preferable that the adult handles the more complicated actions or those the child finds unfamiliar or unpleasant.

When the role-playing activity involves the child directly, we must give them time and respect their boundaries regarding the actions we perform. For example, a child may prefer to start by playing as the waiter or chef before taking on the role of the customer who orders and eats the food.

Regarding the game itself, it is best to start with simple actions and gradually introduce more complex ones, including those the child finds difficult to tolerate. For instance, we might begin with cooking games and later expand to going to a restaurant, preparing a picnic, etc.

In some cases, to enhance the game or help the child anticipate situations, we can use explanatory materials, sequences, dialogue scripts, menu boards, recipes, etc.

Another activity that can engage the child and help them make decisions is conducting small searches or research on the topic: for example, looking for recipes from different places, searching for restaurants in the city, etc.

These same strategies can be adapted to different situations that the child may find complex or unpleasant.

In Annex I, we can find materials to facilitate role-playing games.

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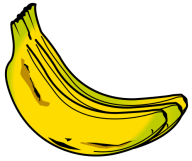
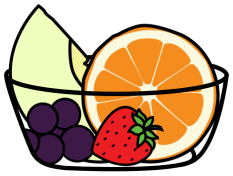
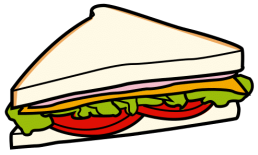
## 6. SNACK CALENDAR

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | |



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# ANNEXES

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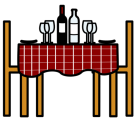
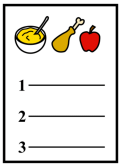
## ANNEX 1: LET'S PLAY IN THE RESTAURANT

# SEQUENCE

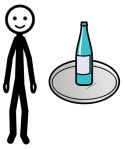
1º **WE SIT**



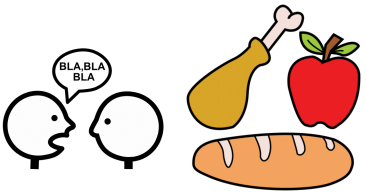
2º **WE LOOK AT THE MENU AND CHOOSE**




3º **WE CALL THE WAITER**



4º **WE ORDER THE FOOD**

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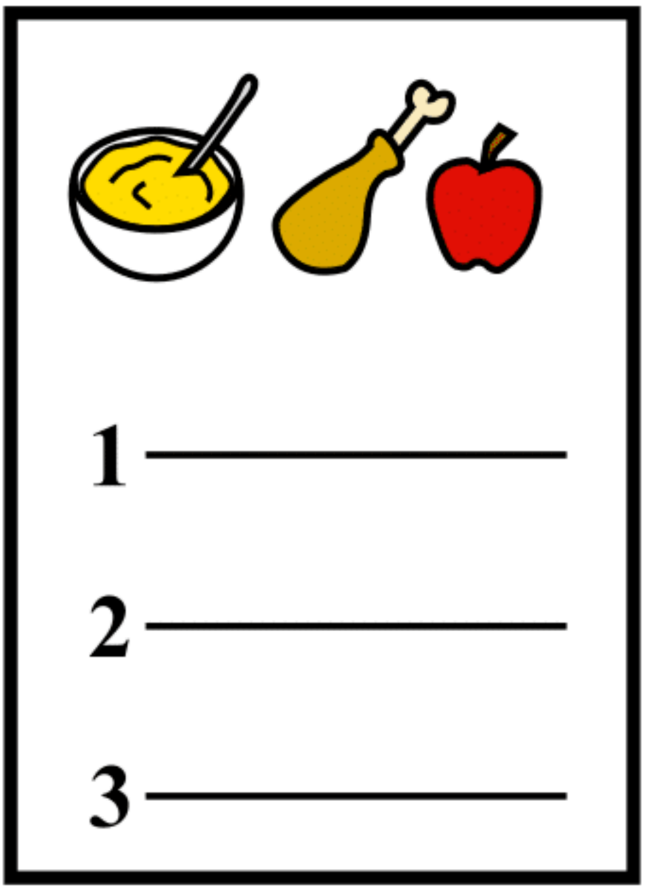
# MENU CREATION GAME

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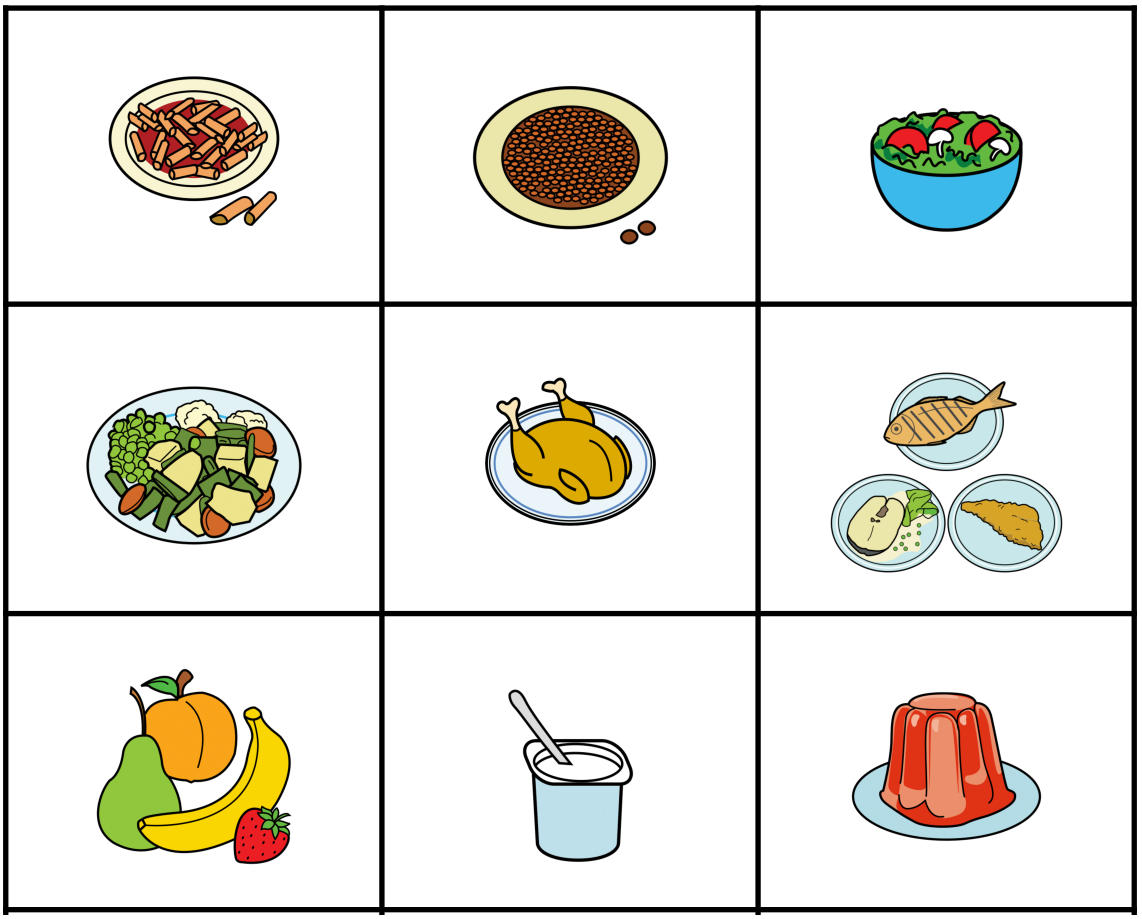
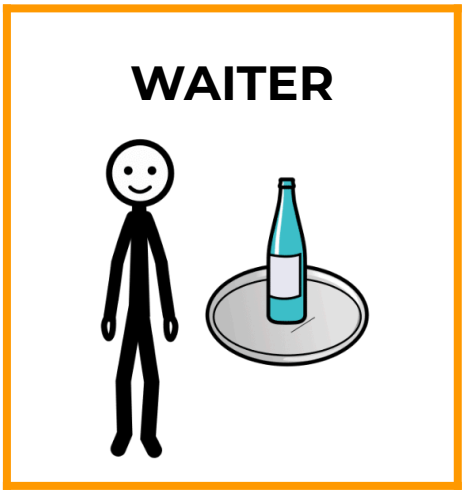


# GAME ROLES

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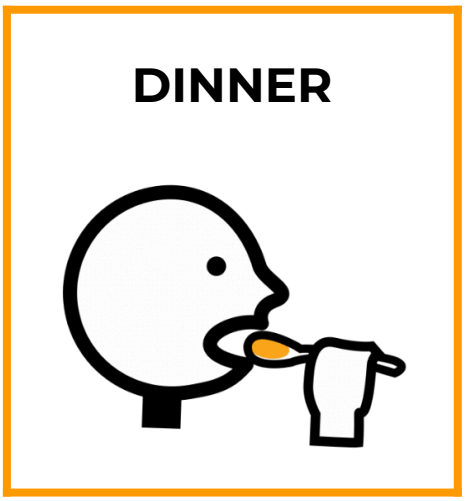

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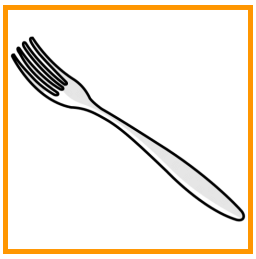
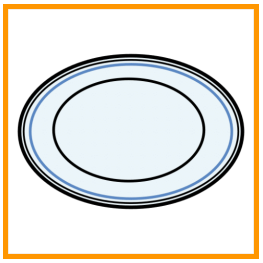
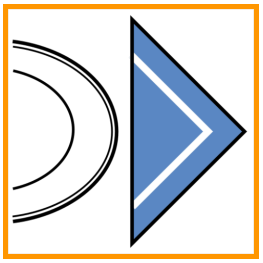
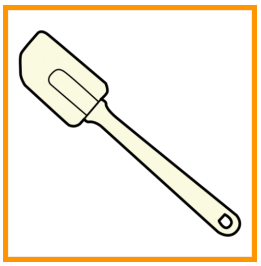
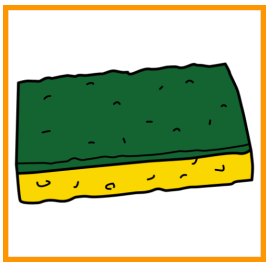
# KITCHEN UTENSILS AND TABLEWARE



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EARLYBRAIN

Empowering families in early intervention care

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