

# FOOD LAB



## *A small-group feeding intensive*

Join our 8-session therapeutic group where children explore food through sensory play, helping them overcome feeding hurdles and gain confidence with food exploration skills.

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**Led by: Marissa Meinema, MS, OTR/L  
Pediatric Occupational Therapist**

# Welcome!

I am so glad you are here! I am grateful for the opportunity to support your family on this journey.

It's a privilege to assist your family and child, tailoring our feeding therapy program to meet their unique needs. I am committed to fostering understanding of your child's challenges through collaborative problem-solving. My holistic approach addresses physical, social, emotional, and cognitive aspects.

Together we can help your child achieve their treatment goals and unlock your child's potential to thrive. Welcome to the journey!

Sincerely,

*Marissa Meinema OTR/L*

Heart of Nature Owner, Pediatric Occupational Therapist



# WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

Pediatric occupational therapy helps children and families to promote functional independence in all their “occupations” – and for children, their occupations are activities that enable them to learn and develop life skills, be creative and play, and thrive in their relationships with others.

Pediatric OT’s help children build a variety of skills such as:

- Fine motor
- Gross motor
- Visual motor
- Executive functioning
- Sensory processing
- Self-regulation and emotional regulation

## ABOUT MARISSA:

Marissa, the owner and operator of “Heart of Nature,” embodies a profound commitment to enriching lives through her unique approach to occupational therapy. As a pediatric occupational therapist residing and practicing in the Roaring Fork Valley, Marissa has seamlessly transitioned her career from conventional indoor settings to the non-traditional community setting.

Equipped with a Bachelor’s Degree in Interdisciplinary Health Studies and a Master’s Degree in Occupational Therapy, both earned from Western Michigan University, Marissa possesses a formidable foundation of knowledge and expertise. Her academic achievements underscore her dedication to understanding holistic health principles and applying them in innovative ways to benefit her clients.

Marissa’s passion for fostering connections, community and witnessing personal growth is in every aspect of her practice. She specializes in Sensory Integration, Feeding therapy, Primitive Reflex, and Executive Functioning, leveraging her specialized training to tailor interventions that facilitate optimal development and well-being for pediatric clients.

# FRAMEWORK

Led by Marissa's expertise in developmental motor skills, this 4-week group utilizes a sensory-informed approach to address picky eating and sensory-based food avoidance. Through an evidence-based desensitization hierarchy, we address the "whole child"—integrating sensory and nutritional factors to help children confidently master new textures and types of food.

## IS MY CHILD A CANDIDATE FOR FEEDING THERAPY?

This group is specifically designed for children who struggle with food selectivity and sensory processing related to eating. An appropriate candidate typically presents with the following:

**Limited Food Repertoire:** Eats a restricted variety of foods (often fewer than 20 items) and may be described as a "chronically picky eater."

**Sensory Avoidance:** Frequently gags, pushes food away, or becomes distressed when presented with new textures, smells, or visual appearances of food.

**Brand or Shape Rigidity:** Only accepts specific brands or "safe" presentations (e.g., only eating a specific brand of chicken nugget or requiring crusts to be removed).

**Texture Sensitivity:** Avoids entire food groups based on consistency (e.g., refuses all "mushy" foods, "crunchy" foods, or mixed textures like casseroles).

**Mealtime Anxiety:** Experiences stress or rigid behaviors during meals, making family dining difficult.

**Social Readiness:** Is able to sit in a group setting (with support) and can benefit from social modeling—watching peers interact with food in a playful, low-pressure environment.

**Note:** This group is most effective for children whose feeding challenges are sensory or behavioral in nature. Children with active medical complications, swallowing disorders (dysphagia), or significant aspiration risks may require individual therapy prior to joining a peer group.

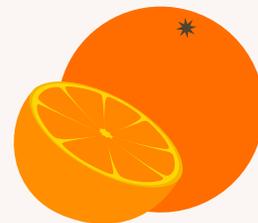
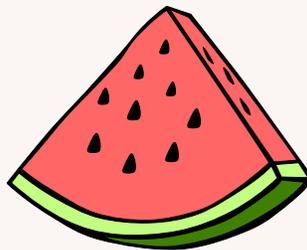
# TREATMENT SESSIONS

45 minutes



A typical group session will follow this structure:

- Sensory activity that consists of activating various sensory systems including: proprioception, vestibular, tactile, and visual
- Hand washing
- Oral motor exercises and visual perceptual focus through how foods are presented (tastes, sizes, textures, shapes, colors, consistency, temperature).
- Introduction of new food with use of food hierarchy of steps (32 steps total).
- Wrap up with sharing positives for the day
- Clean up



# FOOD LAB

# GOALS



## CHILD GOALS:

- To learn to have positive experiences with food
- To learn a mealtime routine and set of Cues to Eating
- To decrease resistance to touching, tasting and swallowing food
- To increase the range of foods children will try
- To increase the volume of food children ingest

## PARENT GOALS:

- To understand the ways children learn how to and how NOT to eat
- To learn the Cues to Eating and the Steps involved in your child learning to eat
- To understand the correct use of support and encouragement
- To create a feeding program for you to use with your child outside of therapy sessions

## PERSONAL FAMILY GOAL:

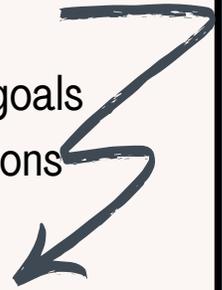


# COST BREAK-DOWN

## Step 1: OT Evaluation

Includes:

- Virtual 25 minute parent intake
- Written summary of current feeding challenges and goals
- 25 minute virtual parent meeting at the end of 8 sessions



## Step 2: Food Lab sessions

Includes:

- 8 total group peer sessions, Wednesday and Friday for 4 weeks, 4:15-5:00 PM
- All snack food provided
- Small group size to optimize learning and growth with pediatric occupational therapist

Total Cost: \$550/ child



# FAQs

## Where are sessions held?

Sessions are held on Wednesday and Fridays at the Mindful Me Playhouse located in Carbondale.

## What to bring?

Your child may attend independently. A parent or caregiver must remain reachable by phone throughout the class.

## How to prepare your child for the class:

Tips for parents when explaining it:

- Avoid words like therapy, problem, or fix
- Use playful language like food explorers or food scientists
- Emphasize choice and control (“you get to decide”)
- Reassure them that familiar foods will be there too
- Keep explanations short and repeatable



# DISCLAIMER:

This class is designed to provide general guidance and support for children working on feeding skills. It is led by a licensed occupational therapist, but it is not a substitute for individualized medical or therapeutic care. Marissa is not an SOS-certified practitioner, but she has experience incorporating elements of the SOS program in her feeding therapy. She also relies on evidence-based knowledge of developmental milestones in feeding and oral motor development to provide effective therapy for children, both individually and in group settings.

# REFERENCES:

*The SOS Approach to Feeding program was developed by and copyrighted by Dr. Kay Toomey. Please note, all materials, documents, and forms taken from the SOS Approach to Feeding program are copyrighted and cannot be reproduced in any form without the written permission of Dr. Kay Toomey. For more information on the SOS Approach to Feeding program, please visit [www.sosapproach.com](http://www.sosapproach.com).*

# RESEARCH:

There are 267 research studies and scholarly publications that provide the foundational information about feeding development and the unique challenges faced by children with feeding and eating difficulties. There are an additional 130 research studies/publications which support the specific techniques and strategies implemented in the SOS Approach to Feeding therapy sessions and general treatment strategies.

# THERAPUETIC APPROACHES USED IN THIS INTENSIVE:

- *Gradual Desensitization*
- *Sensory Integration*
- *Play-Based Learning*
- *Behavioral Techniques*
- *Developmental Skill Building*
- *Family Education and Support*

# MISSED SESSIONS:

Please note there are no make-up sessions for missed classes. If you are unable to make it to a class, please let the Occupational Therapist know in advance.

