1. Learning to eat without help is an important and much anticipated milestone for babies and toddlers.
2. Here are some readiness signs that your child is ready to start learning to self-feed:
   - Leans forward and opens mouth to show you that it’s time for another bite
   - Enjoys touching and playing with food or spilt milk
   - Eagerly reaches for the food or spoon
3. Be prepared...self-feeding is a wonderful time for your child to explore different sensory experiences and that means it will be messy! Place a vinyl tablecloth or shower curtain under the highchair to make clean-up a little bit easier.
4. Let’s look at the stages babies go through when learning to self-feed.

**Handling a Bottle or Cup**
Holds a bottle or a sippy cup with handles using both hands

**Finger Feeding**
Holds and mouths large cracker or teething biscuit
Enjoy feeding self “finger foods” that melt in the mouth
Plays with food (pokes peas, smashes bananas); willingly dips fingers into pureed textures, such as mashed potatoes or applesauce, and then brings fingers to the mouth

**Spoon Feeding**
Uses spoon as a toy at first (reaches for, holds, bangs, and chews on the spoon)
Dips spoon in food
Brings spoon to the mouth, but may turn spoon over
Scoops food with a spoon with some spilling
After the spoon is mastered, your child will learn to stab small bites of food with a fork

**Playful Fine Motor Activities to Promote Self-Feeding Skills**
Use a spoon to scoop pom-poms or marshmallows into a bowl
Put small objects into a container with holes
Play with peg boards, shape sorters, bead toys, and peg puzzles
Put Cheerios into *The Cheerios Play Book*
Use scoops and shovels in a sandbox or tub of dry soup beans
Play with play-dough (poke, roll, pinch, knead)

Reference: Revised Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP)