

Using Family Style Meals



Early Care and Education providers can influence children's eating behaviors by how they offer food. By serving family style meals, a provider can create a supportive, encouraging, and healthy mealtime setting that offers children healthy foods and helps them learn to enjoy them.

What are family style meals?

During a family style meal, food is placed on the table in serving bowls and children are encouraged to serve themselves. Some children may need help from an adult. Caregivers sit at the table and eat with the children to help model proper mealtime manners.

Why does this matter?

Family style meals help children develop a number of skills and abilities including:

- Motor skills
- Language
- Self-esteem
- Social skills
- Table manners
- Independence
- Self-Regulation

Tips for successful family style meals

- Use child-sized items if you can: table, chairs, serving bowls and spoons, plates, and utensils.
- Let children help from start to finish. This includes preparing the food, setting the table, serving themselves and cleaning up.
- Encourage, but never force children to take a little of everything. Help them understand what an appropriate serving size is (for example: 1 scoop, 2 scoops, etc.).
- Talk about the taste, smell, look, and feel of food. Family style meals are a great time to teach new vocabulary and help children learn to appreciate and enjoy their food.
- Start small by serving food in the family style at a snack, or begin with letting children set the table.