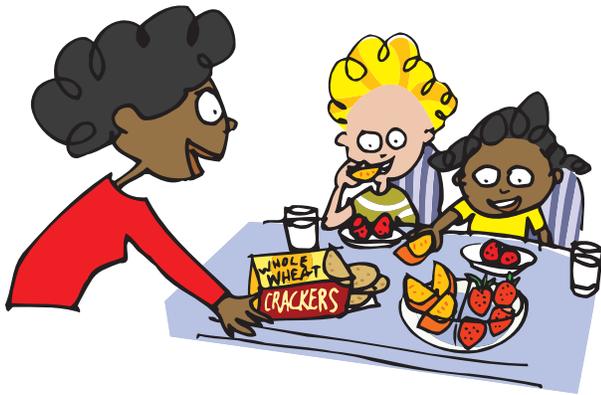


# Supplement E: Support Family Style Meals

## Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program



**Family style meals provide many benefits to both** children and child care providers. In family style meal service, food and beverages for the meal are placed in common serving bowls, plates, dishes, pitchers, and containers on the table. Foods are passed around the table and children serve themselves *how much* and *what* they would like to eat, with the help of an adult when needed. Children are encouraged to try each food and can take more food during the meal if it's available.

Because family style meals allow children to have control over how much or how little food they want to eat, this type of meal service can help children:

- **Eat based on their hunger and fullness cues**
- **Develop independence**
- **Build self-esteem and confidence**
- **Develop healthy eating behaviors, such as trying new foods and making healthy food choices**

Children will also learn and improve their social skills, language skills, and table manners.

### How can I prepare for family style meals?



**CACFP Crediting Tip:**  
**When preparing foods for family style meals, enough food should be provided for each child to be able to take the full CACFP portion size, as well as adults who are eating with the children. Children should be encouraged to take the full portion, but they are not required to take or consume the full portion for CACFP reimbursement.**

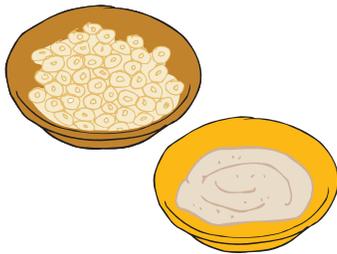
- 1) **Set a start date.** Look at the calendar and think about when you would like to start serving family style meals in your child care program. Once you have a date in mind, work backwards and decide on dates and deadlines for buying supplies, holding training, and educating parents and children on family style meals.
- 2) **Buy equipment.** Most servingware and dishes are designed for adults and may be too big or heavy for young children to easily handle. If possible, try to buy supplies that are child-sized, unbreakable, stain-, odor-, and scratch-resistant, and convenient (dishwasher and microwave safe). You can use the information in the table on the next page as a guideline for items you would like to purchase.

*more 'prepare for family style meals' tips on next page...*



...more 'prepare for family style meals' tips

Child-Size Dishes and Utensils	Estimated Sizes
Plates	7-8 inches in diameter
Bowls	2-4 inches in diameter
Cups	8-10 fluid ounces
Eating Utensils/Spoons	5-6 inches in length
Serving Bowls	6-9 inches in length
Serving Spoons/Ladles/Spoodles	7-8 inches in length
Serving Tongs	4-6 inches in length
Serving Pitchers	13 fluid ounces



**Tip:** Try using colored serving utensils and dishes and white eating utensils and dishes so that children can tell the difference between the two. This will help remind the children not to lick the colored serving spoon or eat from the colored serving bowl.

- 3) Provide training.** If you have other staff or helpers, organize a meeting to introduce and teach about family style meals. You may want to include detailed instructions about helping children serve themselves, determining portion sizes, and encouraging children to eat based on their hunger and fullness.

Talk about things to expect, and possible challenges and solutions (See “Mythbusters” at the end of this supplement). You may also want to brainstorm how to keep a positive meal environment (See Supplement D: Create a Positive Meal Environment from *Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program*. <http://teammnutrition.usda.gov>) and how to encourage, but not force, children to try or eat the food being served (See Supplement C: Encourage Healthful Foods from *Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program*. <http://teammnutrition.usda.gov>). If possible, role-play serving meals family style to increase awareness of some of the challenges that might come up.

- 4) Educate parents, caregivers, and other family members.** Send the message home and put the “family” into family style meals! You may wish to hold a meeting, tell parents and other caregivers during drop-off or pick up time, or send a letter home letting them know you will be starting family style meals on a certain date. Describe and explain what family style meals are, highlight the benefits to the children, and ask them to talk to their children about this change. If some families already do this at home, ask them to share their experience with the rest of the group.

more 'prepare for family style meals' tips on next page...



more 'prepare for family style meals' tips

## Connect with Parents

- ▶ **Adapt and give parents and other caregivers** the Sample Letter to Parents on Family Style Meals from the Institute of Child Nutrition's CARE Connection. <http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100916045241.pdf>
- ▶ **You can also point parents and other caregivers** to the New York State Department of Health's "Serving Meals Family Style" Web page. <http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/resources/servmealsfs.htm>



- 5) Educate children.** Explain to the children that there will be some changes at mealtime and snack time. Have them practice some of the skills they will need, such as pouring water into cups, passing empty serving dishes, and scooping dried beans from a large bowl into a smaller one. As their skills develop, allow them to serve themselves one item during snack time or mealtime and continue to add more items until children are serving all foods to themselves.

**For more information and resources, please visit the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN). See Lesson 5: Mealtime Procedures.**  
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20140423090130.pdf>

**The "Family-Style Mealtime Checklist" on page 101 can help you create and follow a routine for successful family style mealtimes.**

## What can I do to make family style meals a success?

### ▶ **Be a good role model:**

You already know about the many ways that you can influence children's lives! Children are constantly watching you and copying what you do, which lets you be a positive role model for them to follow. Some ways to be a good role model for family style meals include:

- **Eating the same foods** as the children, and not eating unhealthy foods in front of them.
- **Sitting and eating** with the children at mealtimes and snack times.
- **Having everyone**, including adults, sit down before the meal starts and having everyone stay seated until the meal ends.
- **Being enthusiastic and positive** while trying different foods. For example, say "This pineapple looks so sweet and juicy! I can't wait to try it!" or "This lettuce tastes so fresh and crunchy! Do you want to try it?"
- **Demonstrating good table manners**, such as:
  - Saying "please," "no, thank you," and "thank you."
  - Chewing foods slowly and not speaking while mouths are full.
  - Using napkins for cleaning messy hands or faces.
  - Waiting until everyone has served themselves before eating.



► **Teach through talking:**

Family style meals provide lots of opportunity for social interaction and conversation. Try talking to the children about:

● **How full or hungry they feel throughout the meal.**

- Is your stomach telling you that you're full?
- Has your tummy had enough?
- If you are hungry, you can have more.

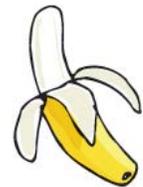


● **What nutritious foods do for our bodies.**

- Eating carrots will keep our bodies healthy, especially our eyes!
- Milk is good for our teeth and bones. Can you show me how nice and strong your teeth are?
- Do you know the protein in those beans will help you grow strong muscles?
- We need strong muscles so we can play!

● **The different food groups they see on the table**, and examples of foods in each group. You can visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) or the “Discover MyPlate” Five Food Groups handout at [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/tn/dmp\\_tgfive.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/tn/dmp_tgfive.pdf) to learn more about the five food groups.

- We eat bread from the grains group.
- What food group do you think bananas are a part of? What about eggs?



**You can print a picture of MyPlate that has examples of foods in each food group and display it near your eating area.**

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/resources/myplate-graphic-resources>

● **Why it is good to eat foods from all food groups**, and serve themselves more food from different food groups if they are still hungry.

- I can tell you really like vegetables!
- Would you like to try some chicken?

● **Where food comes from, how food grows, or what time of the year it grows.**

- Where does milk come from?
- Where does broccoli come from?
- Did you know spinach grows in a garden?



● **Foods they eat at home and what their favorite foods are.**

- Have you seen this food before?
- Do you eat this food at home?
- What foods do you like the best?
- Why do you like it?

● **The color, shape, size, and temperature of the food or other items on the table.**

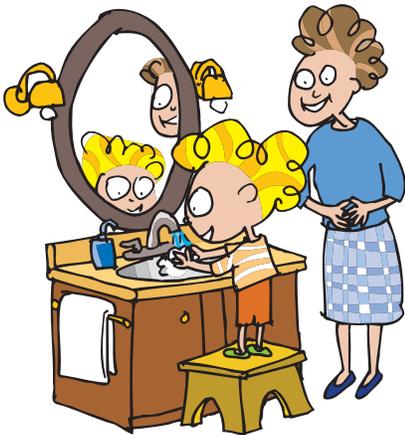
- Is this food hot or cold?
- How many foods on this table are red?
- What color is this peach?
- What is the name of that vegetable?
- How many colors do you see?

● **The serving skills and table manners that you see around the table.**

- I see some great table manners here!
- I like how nicely and carefully you passed that bowl.
- Great serving skills and I like how you said “please” and “thank you.”

► **Keep kids safe!**

Child care providers and other adults can also help make family style meals a success by making sure food is handled properly and everyone stays safe. Some tips to follow include:



● **Before the Meal:**

- Make sure all children and adults wash their hands before eating or preparing the meal.
- Clean tables and other surfaces with hot soapy water, disinfect, and allow the surfaces to air dry before eating. Keep cleaning tools, such as sponges, paper towels, and cleaning cloths close by to wipe up spills, and show children how to clean up properly.
- Make sure the foods served are not choking hazards, which may include cutting food into smaller pieces. Foods that are round, hard, small, thick and sticky, smooth, or slippery may increase the risk of choking. (For more information, see Supplement A: Practice Choking Prevention from *Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program*. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/supplementA.pdf>)
- Use the right-sized serving tools and utensils for children. Think about the weight of the serving utensil, the serving dish or plate, and the food. If possible, divide the food on multiple plates and dishes to make it lighter in weight and easier for the children to pass around the table.

● **During the Meal:**

- Seat children who need more help near you or other adults and help them as needed.
- Provide and encourage everyone to use tongs, spoons, and scoops to serve themselves, rather than the utensils they will use to eat.
- Teach children how to pass the food without putting their hands in the container or touching the foods.
- Remind children to take the foods they touch when serving themselves.
- Watch over sick children to be sure food is handled safely and germs are not passed around.



## Family Style Meals Mythbusters

Myth	Reality
<p data-bbox="152 296 682 363"><b>Family style meals will cost more money and cause more work.</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="820 296 1445 436"><b>Meals served family style do not cost any more than meals served preplated. In both cases, enough food must be prepared to provide every child the full portion of each food component served.</b></p> <p data-bbox="820 474 1461 615"><b>Family style meals may end up being less work for you because the children will be serving themselves. This lets you and other adults stay at the table and enjoy the meal or snack with the children.</b></p> <p data-bbox="820 653 1453 831"><b>You can have the children help you by teaching them how to set the table before the meal and clean up after the meal. They can also be taught how to clean up spills and other messes. Once they have learned how to do this, it will be less work for you and others.</b></p>
<p data-bbox="152 869 641 936"><b>The children in my care are too young for family style meals.</b></p>	<p data-bbox="820 869 1421 936"><b>Many providers have reported success with family style meals with children as young as 2 years old.</b></p> <p data-bbox="820 974 1421 1115"><b>Start slowly by introducing one item served family style at a time during mealtimes and snacks, watching the children closely, and helping them when needed.</b></p>
<p data-bbox="152 1142 673 1209"><b>Children may serve themselves too much or too little food.</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="820 1142 1453 1398"><b>Children can be guided to follow their hunger and fullness cues and be encouraged to eat accordingly. This is one of the benefits of family style meals: it allows children to control how much they want to eat. Remind the children that they can start with a small amount of food, and take more if they are still hungry.</b></p> <p data-bbox="820 1436 1437 1650"><b>To encourage children to take appropriate portions for their age, use serving utensils that provide the amount needed for one serving. For example, if the meal pattern calls for ½ cup of fruit, and you are offering diced peaches, have children use a ½ cup scoop, ladle, or spoodle to serve the peaches.</b></p>

*more 'family style meals mythbusters' on next page...*



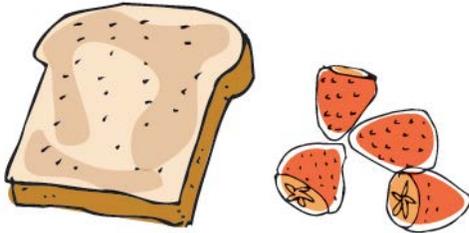
...more 'family style meals mythbusters'

## Family Style Meals Mythbusters

### Myth

### Reality

**We won't get our CACFP reimbursement if a child doesn't take the full servings required in the meal patterns. What if a child takes only one or two foods?**

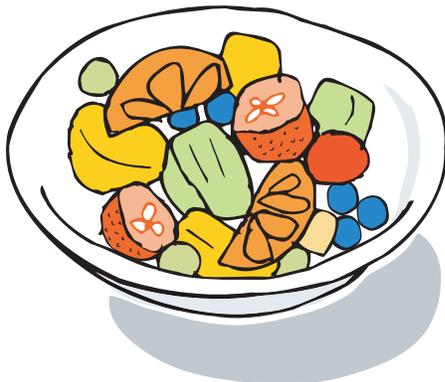


**For reimbursement in family style meal service, CACFP requires that the full portion of each food component for every child be put on the table and offered to the children. Supervising adults should actively encourage (but not force) children to accept the full portion during the meal. If a child refuses to take one or more food components, he or she should be offered that food again before the meal is finished.**

**For the meal to be reimbursed, children are not required to take all components. They also do not have to consume the full portion of any components they take.**

**To encourage children to try foods from each component, use "Phrases That Help" in Supplement C: Encourage Healthful Foods from Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program. <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov>**

**Our meals and snacks come pre-portioned from the caterer or vendor, so we can't serve family style.**



**Ask your caterer or vendor to deliver the food in serving bowls or containers, so that it can still be served family style. If that's not possible, have the children pass around foods that are not preplated, so they can still practice some aspects of family style meals.**

## Activities

### How can I put family style meals into practice in my child care program?

Read through these tips below and check off the ones you would like to try. You can also circle the ones you have tried and had success with.

**Practice makes perfect:** During playtime, have children practice the motions and skills needed to serve themselves. These may include scooping objects into a bowl, using tongs to move objects from one dish to another, and pouring water. You can use items such as small toys, pretend food, sand, dried beans, or uncooked pasta. What other ideas will you try to help kids build skills for family style meals? \_\_\_\_\_

**Start slowly:** Introduce family style meals by starting with finger foods or cold foods during a snack or a meal. These foods may be easier for children to handle. What foods do you plan to start with when introducing family style meals to the children?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Set up, clean up:** Show the children how to set the table for a meal and how to clean up afterwards. You can also show them how to clean up spills and other messes that they may make.

**Allow plenty of time:** Give children enough time to eat so mealtimes and snack times are relaxed, not rushed. Write in the amount of time for each meal:

- Breakfast \_\_\_\_\_
- Morning snack \_\_\_\_\_
- Lunch \_\_\_\_\_
- Afternoon snack \_\_\_\_\_
- Supper \_\_\_\_\_

**Practice patience and persistence:** Accept that meal times can be messy and it may take some time for children to fully develop the skills they need to successfully serve themselves. Keep in mind that this is normal and all part of the learning process. While it may be tempting to give up on family style meals, stick with them and they will soon pay off!

**Send the message home:** Send a letter to parents and caregivers that gives more information about family style meals. See “Connect with Parents” on the third page of this supplement.

**Other ideas:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

