

INTRODUCING FAMILY-STYLE MEALS

Family-style meals are considered a best practice when eating with children of all ages in child care settings. It's all about creating a positive, interactive mealtime experience.

UNDERSTAND THE BASICS



REGULATION REQUIRES AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING

Children serve themselves, independently or with the help of a staff member.



Serve food in containers placed on the table where children are seated.



A staff member sits at the table and eats with the children.



Children pass a serving container from person to person.



BEST PRACTICE INCLUDE ALL 4 ASPECTS*

**Empower facilities are expected to have a written family-style meals policy and share it with families.*

REGULATION REQUIRES STAFF TO

Encourage, but never force, children to eat food.

Assist each child who needs assistance with eating.

Teach self-feeding skills and habits of good nutrition.



ESTABLISH THE ENVIRONMENT



BEST PRACTICE ENCOURAGES STAFF TO

**BE
PRESENT**

LET GO

- Turn off all screens (television, videos, phones).
- Invite families to observe or participate in snacks or mealtimes.
- Children select and serve most or all of their own food.
- Allow children to follow their own hunger and fullness cues.
- Provide learning opportunities during accidents and spills.

REGULATION REQUIRES FACILITIES TO



MASTER THE MEAL SERVICE

Y

U

Use separate containers for each food item.

M

Make available at least the minimum portion by age.

M

Make all 5 of the required food components available at the same time.

BEST PRACTICE ENCOURAGES FACILITIES TO

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SIZE



Use serving scoops that match the required portion size.

Use child size utensils and wide-rimmed plates.

Serve drinks in an open cup when children are ready.

INVOLVE THE KIDS



Fill pitchers half way to make pouring easier.

Let children set and clear the table.

PROVIDE EXTRA



Make second servings available.

Keep extra napkins and utensils available for drops and spills.

BE A ROLE MODEL

I establish a calm, predictable mealtime routine and schedule. This includes announcing the menu and washing hands!

I sit and talk with the kids, modeling good social interaction. What is your favorite animal? Rawr!

I model setting the table, serving myself, passing foods, saying "please", "thank you" and cleaning up.

I try new foods and follow my own hunger and fullness cues.

I don't bribe or withhold food. It's not a punishment or reward. Children can leave food on their plate or ask for more!



This document contains shared family-style meal guidance for regulatory requirements and best practices. This has been updated by First Things First and was originally developed as a collaboration between the following organizations:



The above organizations would like to thank the Arizona Early Childhood Education Association for contributing provider feedback.