

Healthy and Safe Eating in the Child Care Setting

This resource supports healthy and safe meal service in the Child Care setting and provides information about family style meals and children participating in food preparation.

Family Style Meals

Family style meals provide a learning opportunity for children by allowing children and supervising adults to share a meal together. Once food is placed on the table, children are encouraged to serve themselves. This allows children to choose the food and the amount they want to eat.

Benefits of Offering Family Style Meals

Family style meals:

- Encourages positive behaviours through role modeling as children and adults sit together.
- Allows children to choose how much to eat according to how hungry they are.
- Helps in the development of motor, language and social skills.
- Builds self-esteem, develops independence and helps children learn new skills.
- Encourages children to try new foods by allowing them to feel in control of their eating.
- Provides opportunities for children to learn about how to act when eating with others.

Tips for Beginning Family Style Meals

Before starting:

- Get parent and staff support for family style meals.
- Establish and share rules with the children. For example, rules such as “do not touch the food” or “keep the spoon in the bowl” can be talked about and practiced.
- Practice passing bowls of dry beans or pitchers of water with the children.

- Start slowly with easy-to-serve items such as whole wheat buns; then add other food items one food at a time.
- Be prepared for messes. Keep towels or napkins nearby for quick clean-up if there are spills.

Follow these food safety tips to prevent food contamination when serving family style meals:

- Always have an adult sitting at the table with the children for meals and snacks.
- Have children and adults wash their hands before and after all meals and snacks.
- Serve food in containers with lids so that it can be covered easily after passing.
- Provide appropriate serving utensils (such as spoons and tongs) for the food being offered.
- Children should not touch the food or parts of the container or utensils that touches the food.
- Keep extra serving utensils on hand in case someone drops or accidentally touches it.
- Throw away food left in the serving container at the end of the meal or snack.
- To cut down on waste, serve food in multiple small serving containers instead of one large container
- After each child has served themselves, they should leave the utensil in the bowl with the handle facing out before passing it to the next child.
- Children should only serve themselves; not other children.
- Throw away left-over beverages served from a pitcher after the meal or snack.

Note - In an outbreak situation in the childcare setting, family style meals should not be offered. During an outbreak, staff should serve the children.

Children Participating in Food Preparation

Offering opportunities for children to participate in their own meal and snack preparation helps children to develop food skills, allows them to be creative and helps to build their self-confidence. Children should always be supervised by an adult when handling food.

Follow these food safety tips when children are participating in preparing their own food in the child care setting:

- Choose foods and preparation tasks according to the children's age and abilities.
- Do not allow children to handle raw meats, raw eggs or unwashed fruit or produce.
- Food preparation by children should not be done in the kitchen. Use the tables where children sit and eat for food preparation.
- Clean and sanitize all surfaces used for food preparation.
- Children must always wash their hands before and after handling food.
- Provide each child with a plate or napkin to place their pre-portioned foods on.
- Each child must use a utensil to choose their own ingredients.
- Children should only make food for themselves; not for other children.
- Label food with the child's name to make sure the food is served to the correct child if not being eaten at the time of preparation.

Questions or concerns?

For more information contact Health Protection and Investigation at 519-575-4400.

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Region of Waterloo Public Health

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