

Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Fostering a Positive and Friendly Eating Environment

What does it mean to foster a positive and friendly eating environment? It includes what and how you serve each day. Being a Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provider offers you the opportunity to give children positive meal experiences that will encourage healthy eating habits for a lifetime. Food should nurture the body for healthy growth and development. It is important to serve foods that taste good and offer nutrients and satisfaction in every meal.



Take steps to ensure mealtime is a positive experience for every child in your care.

1 When fostering a friendly eating environment, encourage and applaud children with positive statements that help build their self-esteem.

2 Be consistent by providing meals and snacks at the same time each day, and advocate for children to try new things.

3 Pair children new to your child care facility with other children to help them feel welcome and become familiar with the day's activities and routine.

4 Support children in eating their meals, recognizing their hunger cues, and practicing family style meal service.



Children's confidence increases when adults and peers support and applaud them as they make strides or accomplish goals, such as trying new foods or serving themselves.

Always consider children in your care who require special dietary accommodations. Provide foods they can eat and make sure they are not served foods they cannot eat. Children with special dietary needs should be welcomed and made to feel comfortable with their peers at mealtime. Special dietary needs may require working with a registered dietitian to create a meal plan that also meets meal pattern requirements.

If a dietitian is needed, have a conversation with the parents/guardians first, followed by a meeting with the dietitian. If possible, schedule the meeting with both at the same time. After a meal plan is established, check in with the parents/guardians to see how things are going and if any changes are needed. Ensure the parents/guardians feel comfortable talking with staff and feel welcome to drop in when they want.

Take time to evaluate your program, including the foods and beverages you serve. Consider how and where meals and snacks are served.



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- Have you looked carefully at your menus?
- Do you ask the children what foods they would like to see on the menu?
- What is the children's eating environment?
- Does your child care program teach children where food comes from and how it grows?

All of these questions provide you the opportunity to offer a positive meal experience.

Reference

- Appetite to Play. (2019). *Facilitating a positive meal time environment*.
<https://www.appetitetoplay.com/healthy-eating/tips-ideas/facilitating-positive-meal-time-environment>
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2018, May). *Positive eating environment self- assessment for ECE programs*. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/positive-eating-assessment.pdf>



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