

Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Healthy Meals, Divided Responsibilities

The Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) knows that you want the best nutrition for the children you serve. Children can sometimes be wary of the healthy food options offered, and for picky eaters, mealtime can be stressful. Defining and maintaining the division of feeding responsibilities helps to create structure and take the stress out of mealtime. These actions can provide a supportive environment where children can learn healthy, [independent eating habits](#).

Ellyn Satter's work on division of responsibility in feeding (sDOR) is recognized as a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) best practice. It encourages the child care provider to decide the what, when, and where of feeding. The provider chooses what food to serve and determines the scheduled events leading up to and after mealtimes. The child's responsibility is to determine what food to eat and how much to consume. The following describes the responsibility of child care providers and children in more detail and adapts these concepts to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) environment.



Child Care Provider's Responsibilities

- Serve healthy, balanced meals and snacks—giving children access to a wide variety of nutrients—by providing food choices from all five food groups. This USDA standardized [Lasagna with Ground Turkey](#) recipe from ICN's [Child Nutrition Recipe Box](#) meets several meal components in one serving! One portion serving provides 1.75 ounce equivalent meat/meat alternate, 3/4 cup vegetable, and 1 ounce equivalent grain. While family style dining is a CACFP best practice, this meal can also be pre-portioned onto plates and served directly to the children. This extra step minimizes the need to pass dishes around the table and helps reduce exposure to germs, which is important during COVID-19.



- Set a routine and keep it consistent. This structure allows children to feel safe in their decisions to eat or not to eat. For example, before and after lunch, perform the same pattern of activities every day. Before lunch, this pattern of activities could include storytime, handwashing, setting the table, and sitting at a designated table. After lunch, the pattern of activities could include handwashing, cleaning up, brushing teeth, taking a bathroom break, and settling down for quiet time.
- To encourage adequate nutrition intake, ensure children have enough time to eat without being rushed. Providing enough time allows children to recognize and respond to their fullness (also known as satiety) cues.



Tips for Creating a Positive Mealtime Experience

- Serve as a role model by eating the same food as the children.
- Taste everything and try not to show your personal preference.
- Provide small amounts of new foods in combination with popular and more familiar foods.
- Encourage children to try new foods, but do not pressure them.
- Make positive, encouraging statements throughout the meal.
- Encourage children to make positive comments about the foods they are eating.
- Smile and use positive reinforcement when children eat their food.
- Use mealtime to teach children about the benefits of the foods they are eating.
 - The skin on your apple has good fiber that helps to keep your [heart healthy!](#)
 - The [whole grains](#) in your waffle will give you energy, which can help you run faster!
 - The chicken on your plate has [protein](#) that can help your muscles grow!
 - Drinking low-fat milk helps your [bones stay strong](#) to support your body!
 - When you eat healthy meals, you can [learn](#) and [play](#) better in school!

Children's Responsibilities

- Allow children to determine how much they eat. It is normal for a child's appetite to vary, and doing so helps them learn to listen to their body's hunger cues. Children in tune with their hunger and fullness cues are more likely to consume the proper amount of calories and maintain a healthy weight throughout life.
- Allow children to decide what to eat from the foods that are offered.

Feel free to share these links and resources with the families of the children in your care. Everyone needs a little extra support right now!

References

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