

MEALTIME SCHEDULES & ROUTINES

Mealtime schedules and routines are essential in child care. A schedule is a written outline highlighting the “big picture” of the main activities throughout the day. Although schedules and routines are not the same, they work best when they are used together.

A **great mealtime schedule** allows children to eat every two to three hours.

It features the

- Smooth transitions into mealtimes
- Enough time to eat meals and snacks
- Smooth transitions at the end of mealtimes

Sample Mealtime Schedule Hours of Operation

6:30 am–5:30 pm, may serve:

Breakfast	Lunch	Afternoon Snack
7:00 am–8:00 am	11:00 am–11:45 am	2:15 pm–2:45 pm

A **routine** is an action regularly followed to complete the schedule. For example, before lunch each day, children wash their hands, set the table, and then sit at the table.

SAMPLE MEALTIME ROUTINE

1. **Call for helpers:** Assign daily jobs to children
2. **Transition activity:** Song, restroom, and handwashing
3. Children sit as the food and beverage are placed on the table
4. Children serve themselves with the assistance of adults
5. Adults sit and eat with children
6. Children and adults talk about various topics
7. **Transition activity:** Song, dispose of plates, and handwashing



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Be flexible when interruptions occur.
- Create a visual mealtime schedule and routine for children to view.
- Review the mealtime schedule and routine with the children daily.
- Evaluate your schedule and routine regularly to see if it is ideal for both you and the children in your care.
- Promote food-centered mealtimes by minimizing distractions from toys and devices.