

GRAB AND GO LESSON

CACFP and Family Style Meal Service

Nutrition and Meal Management |
CACFP Meal Pattern

Purpose: This handout provides a review of the requirements for serving meals family style in CACFP operations.

Meals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) may be served family style. In a family style meal service, children are encouraged to serve themselves or with the assistance of an adult. All food for the meal is placed in serving bowls on the table. Milk, water, and juice are served in containers. Children are encouraged to try each food. They may take second helpings of foods; however, only one meal per child can be claimed for reimbursement.

Some states have other health and sanitation requirements for meals that are served family style, such as the type of container in which beverages may be served. Check with your State agency or sponsor about specific guidelines for serving family style meals.

Serving Meals Family Style

When you begin a family style meal service in your facility, there are a few things to do to ensure you are following the requirements. Place enough food on each table to provide the required serving sizes for each of the food components. It is recommended to include enough food to accommodate the supervising adults eating with the children.

For example, there are three children (3–5 years) and one supervising adult seated at the table for lunch. The minimum serving size for fruit for 3–5-year-olds is $\frac{1}{4}$ cup. So, there must be at least $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of sliced apples for each child and adult at the table. In this example, a total of 1 cup of sliced apples is placed in the shared bowl at the start of the meal to meet the minimum serving size.

Children must be allowed to serve the food components themselves, with milk or juice being the exception. If supervising adults choose to pour the beverages, they must serve the required minimum serving size.

Follow These Simple Tips

- Prepare and place all the food on the table at the same time. Double-check the meal pattern to make sure you have all the required food servings and components.
- Have enough food on the table to provide the full required portions of all meal components for each child and caregiver. Some states' sanitation laws require that an adult sits with the children during family style meal service. Even if your state does not require it, you are encouraged to eat with the children. This practice allows children to talk about and try new foods and practice good table manners.
- Offer each meal component to all kids. It is important never to force them to eat a specific food or more than they desire.
- When a child doesn't want to try the food at first, offer the food again later in the meal. If the child took only a very small portion at first, offer another small portion again later.
- A child can request a smaller portion or decline any food.
- A child can decide later in the meal to try a food declined earlier.
- A child can request second helpings of any food that is available after all children have been offered the first serving.
- Make mealtime a happy time with positive conversation and smiles.

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Key Points for a Successful Family Style Service

- Some children need more help than others. Seat these children near you at the table.
- Use child-size tables and chairs, as well as plates and cups, to make it easier for the children to handle self-service and to develop skills.
- Use serving dishes and pitchers that are easy for children to handle.
- Use serving tools, such as tongs, spoons, and scoops that help with serving the right portions of food and are easy for the children to handle.
- Think about children's abilities to serve themselves. Some children may be able to serve themselves many different foods. For others, start with only one or two foods and allow children to serve themselves. Afterward, assist them with serving the other foods that are required in the meal pattern.
- Follow food safety and sanitation practices carefully to make sure that the food is handled correctly and is safe to eat.
- Share these tips with the families in your care by sending home a letter or handout on family style meal service.

References

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2019). *CACFP meal pattern requirements training*. University, MS: Author.
U.S. Department of Agriculture/Food and Nutrition Service. (2020). *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)*. www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/child-and-adult-care-food-program

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