

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Offering and Making Water Available in Child Care

Topic Area: Nutrition and Meal Management
Subtopic Area: Menu Planning

Objective: Recall at least four strategies for offering and making water available to children in child care settings.

During the early years (and beyond), drinking water is essential for good health. It helps the digestive system by moving food through the body. Water helps to cushion joints, protect the spinal cord, and support a normal body temperature. Drinking water is a great alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages like soda and juice. Also, water helps to keep active and growing children hydrated. Because of these and other benefits, child care professionals operating the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) must make drinking water available and offer it to children throughout the day.

What are the CACFP requirements for providing water?

There are three factors for providing water to meet the CACFP requirements. First, it's optional to have water available for self-serve. Younger children may not have the motor skills for serving themselves water and may need help from adults. Second, "offering" means asking children if they would like to have water at different times throughout the day. Some children may need visual cues like seeing the cup or pitcher while hearing you offer them water. Last, always make water available, including mealtimes. Although you don't have to offer water at meals or snacks, you must provide it if a child requests it. If you give children water at mealtimes, consider offering small amounts so that the children are not too full to eat.

What are some strategies for offering water?

Identifying opportunities to offer water is a simple strategy for meeting the requirements. Here are a few times to consider offering water:

- During or after any physical activity
- After mealtimes
- After returning from outdoor activities
- When in extreme hot or cold temperatures
- Whenever children appear thirsty
- At snack when no other beverage is served

What are some strategies for making water available?

- Place child-sized pitchers and cups on a table for children to access
- Use an indoor water dispenser with cups
- Buy 6- to 8-ounce water bottles for field trips
- Provide (or request from parents) small reusable water bottles for children to fill each day
- Place a water cooler along with cups and a wastebasket in the outdoor play area(s)
- Take routine breaks for children to use a nearby water fountain (if available)



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What are some tips for making water appealing?

- Be a role model and drink water throughout the day. Often, children model the behaviors of those around them.
- Start a “drink more water” initiative that focuses on meeting a set goal for drinking water.
- Make plain water popsicles for hot summer days.
- Add fruit, berries, mint, or cucumbers to a pitcher of water, and complete a taste test with the children
- Incorporate water into learning activities like reading books or painting.
- When assigning daily helpers, incorporate a “water helper” for simple tasks such as refilling the cups or alerting you when the pitcher is low.

Remember, offering and making water available to children is vital for keeping them healthy and hydrated throughout the day. Taking these simple steps can help children to develop healthy habits that can carry over into adulthood. For additional information, refer to the *CACFP 20-2016: Water Availability in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* at https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cacfp/CACFP20_2016os.pdf.

References:

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service through an agreement with the Institute of Child Nutrition at the University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

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