

GRAB AND GO LESSON

A Caring Relationship at Mealtimes

Topic Area: Nutrition and Meal Management
Subtopic Area: Happy Mealtimes

Objective: Recall the responsibilities for children and child care professionals to create happy mealtimes for young children.

Mealtimes are an essential part of most child care settings. This time allows child care professionals to offer young children nutritious meals and snacks. It also allows young children to explore foods, develop skills, and establish eating habits. However, children and adults have different responsibilities at mealtimes. Knowing the responsibilities and some strategies for implementation is key to creating positive, supportive, and happy mealtimes for young children.

Child Care Professional's Responsibilities: What, When, and Where?

- Determine what to serve at mealtimes:
 - o Plan, purchase, and prepare meals that are based on the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal pattern requirements.
 - o Choose a variety of foods with different colors, textures, and flavors for appealing food combinations.
 - o Offer a variety of foods in different forms and combinations throughout the week.
- Establish a mealtime schedule and a location for mealtimes:
 - o Schedule meals and snacks for every two to three hours. This timeframe may vary based on State regulatory requirements.
 - o Create a visual schedule that features mealtimes and share it with the children. This schedule will help children to learn what to expect throughout the day.
 - o Serve meals in an area that has limited distractions at mealtimes to help children better focus on eating.
 - o Establish a mealtime routine for beginning and ending mealtimes. Routines help children to develop a sense of stability and security.
- Create a pleasant mealtime experience:
 - o Purchase child-sized eating and serving plate-ware to serve meals family style. This encourages social, motor, and decision-making skills.
 - o Involve children in setting the table with placemats, plates, cups, utensils, and napkins. Allowing children to help encourages self-help and critical thinking skills.
 - o Eat with children to encourage pleasant conversation at the table and model good eating habits and manners.
 - o Encourage children to try all foods, but never force them to eat any items. Some children may need 10–15 times before they try or like new foods. Also, food should never be used to reward or punish children because it can cause children to over or under eat.
 - o Make positive comments to build positive feelings about food, while avoiding negative statements on the amount each child eats.



GRAB AND GO LESSON

A Caring Relationship at Mealtimes

Topic Area: Nutrition and Meal Management
Subtopic Area: Happy Mealtimes

Child's Responsibilities: What and How Much?

- Choose which foods to eat based on what is served:
 - During the early years, some children will have varying eating preferences. They will eat certain foods today and reject them on another day. Allowing them to choose builds independence and esteem while encouraging healthy eating habits.
- Determine how much to eat:
 - Allowing children to choose how much to eat encourages them to listen to their hunger and fullness cues. Most children will know when they are hungry or full, but may not know how to convey it or may confuse the feeling. Talk to children about what it feels like to be hungry and full. This strategy will help them to regulate how much they eat.

Most importantly, always aim to create a pleasant and happy mealtime experience in your child care setting. These experiences can serve as the basis for healthy eating habits and behaviors that can last a lifetime. For additional information, refer to *Introduction to Happy Mealtimes in Child Care Settings* at theicn.org.

References:

Ellen Satter Institute. (2018). *The division of responsibility in feeding*. Retrieved from <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/how-to-feed/the-division-of-responsibility-in-feeding>

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.

The University of Mississippi is an EEO/AA/Title VI/Title IX/Section 504/ADA/ADEA Employer.

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights; Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

© 2019, Institute of Child Nutrition, The University of Mississippi, School of Applied Sciences

Except as provided below, you may freely use the text and information contained in this document for non-profit or educational use with no cost to the participant for the training providing the following credit is included. These materials may not be incorporated into other websites or textbooks and may not be sold.

The photographs and images in this document may be owned by third parties and used by the University of Mississippi under a licensing agreement. The University cannot, therefore, grant permission to use these images.