

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Benefits for Serving Meals Family Style in Child Care

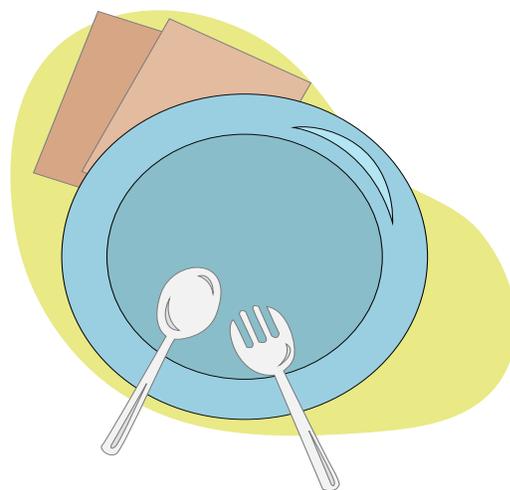
Topic Area: Nutrition and Meal Management
Subtopic Area: Happy Mealtimes

Objective: Recall at least three benefits of serving meals family style in child care settings operating the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

In child care, family style meal service (FSMS) is a great way to provide nutritious meals (including snacks) to young children while promoting healthy eating habits. It allows children to serve themselves from shared bowls of food with the assistance of their teacher (if needed). It also helps to promote positive eating environments when children and adults eat meals together. Most importantly, there are several benefits for children, child care professionals, and those operating the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to implement FSMS in child care settings.

FSMS Benefits for Children

- Children are unsure about new foods. Seeing new foods and watching others serve themselves can increase interest. They are more willing to try a small serving when they see other children or adults trying new or unfamiliar foods.
- Children can choose which foods they would like to eat. When meals are served family style, children may choose to take the minimum amount, a smaller portion, or reject unwanted foods. These options allow children to be in control of their eating habits based on the available food items.
- Children practice fine motor skills and social skills during mealtime. When children serve themselves, they practice skills like passing, pouring, and scooping foods. Taking turns, sharing, and politely turning down foods are all part of the table manners children learn by watching other children and adults.
- Children learn to see all food groups as equal items of a meal or snack. Since all items are placed on the table at the start of the meal, children do not see one food as better than another.



FSMS Benefits for Child Care Professionals

- Children can relax and enjoy the company of their teacher. In FSMS, the food and beverages are placed on the table at the start of the meal. This method reduces the need for teachers to leave the table or mealtime area. As a result, children and teachers can enjoy the meal together in a more relaxed environment.
- Children practice good table manners and pleasant mealtime conversation. When you eat with the children, you can model good table manners and guide children's behavior to keep mealtime pleasant.

FSMS Benefits in the CACFP

In the CACFP, there is one additional benefit for serving meals family style. These meals are reimbursable when they meet the following three requirements:

- At the start of the meal, enough food is placed on the table to provide the full required portion for each component for all children and teachers (if they choose to eat with the children).
- Children serve themselves all food components with the assistance of their teacher. The only exception is beverages; teachers must serve children the minimum amount of milk at the start of the meal.

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- Child care programs may not claim second meals for reimbursement. For example, some children may wish to take seconds after everyone has been served. These portions are not eligible for reimbursement.

Tips for Success

When choosing to serve meals family style, there are several strategies for success. Here are some tips to have happy mealtimes with FSMS:

- Host a parent meeting to introduce FSMS to your child care families.
- Use learning activities to teach children how to pass, pour, and scoop food items.
- Focus on food safety by cleaning and sanitizing tables and making sure everyone washes their hands before the meal begins.
- Provide child-size tongs, spoons, and scoops for serving foods.
- Teach children to pass serving bowls and dishes without putting their fingers into the bowls or touching the foods.
- Expect spills. Children are learning and accidents are normal. Keep clean-up cloths or paper towels handy and wipe up spills without a fuss. Teach children to clean up their spills as well.

Knowing the benefits of FSMS and using these and other tips for success are just two ways to successfully serve meals family style. For additional strategies, refer to *Introduction to Happy Mealtimes in Child Care Settings* at theicn.org.

References:

- Institute of Child Nutrition. (2016). *Introduction to happy mealtimes in child care settings*. Retrieved from <https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/introduction-to-happy-mealtimes-in-child-care-settings/>
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