

Purpose

Meals and snacks must be served family style, including on field trips and other activities where a CACFP meal is served outside of the classroom/center. Family style meals promote social, emotional, gross and fine motor skill development, respects children's food preferences, and children develop the skills to self-feed and serve food to themselves. In family style meals, children and classroom staff sit together at the tables. If there is enough food for all children and the teacher to be offered seconds, then children and staff may eat the same foods together. All staff and volunteers involved in preparing and serving food in the classroom must obtain a [Washington State FoodWorker Card](#). A copy of the current card is located on the *Classroom Emergency Board*. All staff and volunteers must also follow the hand washing procedure.

Procedure

Preparing Meals

- Staff who prepare and serve food must follow food handling procedures in the [Washington State Food and Beverage Worker's Manual](#).
- Food must be prepared in an approved kitchen or food service establishment.
- Foods purchased from grocery stores must be obtained in their original packages and maintained at safe temperatures while transporting to the center/site.
- Donated foods are not allowed because the quality and safety cannot be guaranteed.

Modeling to Children

During mealtimes, model to children how to serve themselves using the serving utensils and by taking small tastes of the food served. This encourages children who may not have served themselves a specific food item (e.g. a vegetable) or an unfamiliar food.

Early Head Start staff are expected to facilitate family style meals with toddlers and will need to provide hand and verbal assistance.

Serving Family Style Meals

- At least one adult sits at each table with children to help children pass foods from common platters and bowls.
- Pass food around the table until everyone has been able to serve themselves each food or has been offered foods at least twice.
- Children must be offered creditable foods two times and have meal attendance recorded before leaving the table for family style meals to be reimbursable.
- If there is enough food for all the children to be offered seconds and for the teacher, then the children and staff can eat the same foods together. Teachers model by taking small tastes of the same food as children.
- Use child-sized tables, chairs, utensils, bowls, and plates.
- Adult's role is to choose and prepare the food, provide regular meals/snacks, make meal times pleasant and welcoming. Honor children's preferences for food while continuing to offer nutrition meals/snacks.
- Children choose what is put on their plate, the amount they would like to eat and learn about foods they enjoy.
- Mealtimes for children are part of class time. Teachers should not bring food not being served to children to the table. Teachers are not expected to put every component on their plate.
- Shall include staff, volunteers and children sharing foods from the same menu in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Children are provided opportunities to participate in meal preparation, family-style service, and cleaning up.
- Foods offered represent different cultural and ethnic backgrounds to broaden the children's food experiences.
- Children are encouraged to taste food but are not forced or coerced to take a bite.
- Children are provided at least 30 minutes for lunch and 20 minutes for breakfast/snack.
- Those who finish early may leave the table to play quietly while others finish eating.

Resources: [Head Start Family Style Meal Tips](#)