

Family-Style Meal Service

Head Start Performance Standard

§ 1302.31 (e) (2)

§ 1302.44 (a) (1)

§ 1302.44 (a) (2)

CACFP Policy & Procedure Manual Chapter 8 Section F

Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care Health and Safety Guidelines for Childcare Operating During COVID-19 Version 2.0

Policy

Family-style meal service allows children to eat together and to make food choices based on individual appetites and food preferences. It promotes mealtime as a learning experience to help children develop positive attitudes toward nutritious foods, develop good eating habits and encourages children to judge their own levels of hunger and fullness.

Family-style meal service is a sit-down meal where communal dishes of food are placed on the table from which children serve themselves. Children are encouraged to serve themselves, or to serve themselves with help from an adult. Enough food must be placed on the table to provide the full required portion size according to Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) requirements for all the children at the table, plus enough to accommodate supervising adults who eat with the children.

Adults are seated at the table and serve as healthy mealtime role models. During the meal, adults support children as they choose the type and amount of food they want to have on their plates. Adults encourage each child to try all foods without coercing them or withholding other foods. Watching adults eat influences children's own food choices, encourages children to try new foods, and helps children develop healthy attitudes towards food.

Mealtime Experience

Feeding routines are highly influenced by cultural and family values and expectations. Perspectives about independent feeding vary widely across cultures. Young children are developing lifelong attitudes toward food and the experience of eating. Children feel competent when they are allowed to decide what, when, and how much to eat. In a relaxed setting, they form positive attitudes and learn vital fine motor skills like passing and pouring, communication, decision making, and other self-help skills. They learn independence, cooperation, and table manners.

Family-style meal service provides children with nutritious meals in a pleasant eating environment, helping them establish good eating habits at a young age. Children are assisted until they develop the necessary skills and strength to serve and pass food. Supervising adults set a good example by having a positive attitude and willingness to try the food, while providing educational activities and mealtime conversations that keep the atmosphere pleasant and light. Taking turns, sharing, and politely turning down foods are all part of the table manners children learn by participating in family-style meal service.

Family-style meals are introduced gradually, especially to mobile infants and young toddlers, beginning with a component that is easy to divide (i.e., bread or rolls with tongs). Teaching staff gradually introduce new serving utensils and demonstrate the correct and safe way to use them and remind children to place them back in the same serving bowls after they have served themselves. Introducing similar items in pretend play areas will encourage practice and skill development.

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Family-Style Mealtime Procedure

- All children in morning programs who have not received breakfast at the time they arrive will be served a nourishing breakfast.
- Teaching staff are encouraged to involve children in meal related activities (setting tables, serving, passing food, cleaning up).
- Teaching staff should develop calm transitional activities before a meal, including finger games, songs, or stories while waiting until everyone is seated.
- When children serve themselves, adults do not hurry their efforts or help them unnecessarily. When assisting children is needed, adults will use the “hand over hand” technique.
- Children serve themselves a minimum of one vegetable and/or one fruit from small containers that are passed around the table. Adults stagger passing serving bowls and milk pitchers (if used) to minimize wait times. Children are encouraged pass the food to their neighbors when they are done serving themselves.
- In Early Head Start, an adult controls the large container of milk and children learn to pour small portions of milk from little pitchers. At Pre-K sites where milk is served in cartons, adults help children open their cartons of milk if the child has not developed the fine motor skills to be able to complete the task.
- Food security may be an issue in some families. Meal participants may display difficulty in sharing food or may serve themselves large portions. Adults reassure children that there is enough food for everyone. Children are encouraged to share and to ask others if they care for more before taking second or third portions. Adults do not limit the number of servings of food, or insist that children eat “growing,” “healthy,” or “good” foods first.
- Mildly ill children at mealtime will be seated next to teaching staff. Teaching staff will serve the child from communal serving bowls.

Adult Modeling at Mealtime

Mealtimes with children are designed for the purpose of modeling and should not replace staff breaks/lunches.

- One adult should be seated at each table during a meal.
- Adults should remain seated as much as possible during the meal and remain within arm’s reach to observe and aid children. Adults should not hover over children or reach over them.
- Adults serve themselves **small** portions (i.e 4 green beans) of all food provided at the meal, unless there is a food allergy, intolerance, or religious beliefs that prevent the consumption of certain foods. Split larger items (hamburgers, pizza) with other adults.
- Adults model appropriate mealtime habits and etiquette, such as saying, “Please pass the (food)” and “Would anyone else care for a second helping?” They use mealtimes as an opportunity for language and nutrition teaching, in addition to teaching and/or demonstrating which foods are finger foods and which foods should be eaten with utensils. Adults should demonstrate a positive attitude towards all foods served regardless of personal beliefs.

Mealtime Conversation

Conversations at the table between children and adults help keep children engaged in the meal and establish a pleasant, calm environment. Conversation topics can vary and do not need to center solely around food and nutrition. Techniques for facilitating conversation include:

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- Ask open-ended questions, model listening skills, eye contact, and encourage turn-taking in conversation.
- Remind children to use “indoor” voices. Change the subject when necessary or suggest a topic to be discussed later.
- Keep the conversation pleasant and appropriate to children’s interests. Discourage talk about personal food dislikes.