

Food Activities with Children

Head Start Performance Standard

§ 1302.31 (e) (2)

§ 1302.44

§ 1302.47 (b) (6) (ii)

Policy

Head Start recognizes preparing and trying new foods as valuable experiences for children in the classroom. Children benefit from developmentally appropriate and interactive food experiences with caring, engaged adults. Participation in food preparation encourages children to try to new foods while promoting learning about nutrition, making healthy food choices, and food safety.

In the process of making snacks and meals, children can learn math and science concepts while providing opportunities to build motor and cognitive skills. Sharing in food tasks also promotes appropriate mealtime behaviors and conversation which builds social and language skills. Children develop confidence and become more self-reliant when they do more for themselves.

Food experiences in the classroom and socializations may not replace planned Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meals and snacks without prior approval from the CACFP Supervisor. Donated food must be provided by a professional kitchen or business.

Children will be encouraged to help with mealtime set-up and clean-up. Food experiences and activities will be tailored to the age and developmental abilities of the children. Staff will ensure safe food handling practices are followed at all times.

Guidelines for Food Experiences

Use food experiences as opportunities for children to build vocabulary, share feelings, describe events, and practice conversational skills. Staff and children can discuss each food, its origin, and texture. Talk about the variety of textures and colors of food on the table. Teach children about the food nutrients and how they keep children healthy. Ask if the food is served at home and if so, how is it the same or different. Staff may include opportunities to introduce a new, seasonal, or cultural food in the lesson plans. When planning food experiences:

- Chose nutritious food with “kid appeal” to introduce children to new or less familiar foods. Look for diversity in shape, color, texture, smell, temperature, and flavor. When appropriate, make comparisons between raw and cooked versions of the same food or different varieties of the same fruit or vegetables such as apples, melons or squash. Allow children to use their senses to learn about similarities and differences in foods and build vocabulary by using descriptive terms for differences in shades of color; differences in texture between the outside and inside of the food or the different varieties. Math concepts can be taught by comparing shapes, size, weight, circumference, organizing the foods by size (i.e. smallest to largest; shortest to longest/tallest; skinny to fat; etc.), graphing preferences.
- Consider ways to pair new foods with familiar ones to improve acceptance or prepare a familiar food in a different way.
- Select foods or recipes reflecting cultural and ethnic diversity. Ask parents/guardians to share family food traditions.
- Plan seasonal food activities to celebrate special occasions and events.
- Teach children about food and kitchen safety by explaining why handwashing is necessary while they are washing, why we need to wash the fruits and vegetables before preparing them, describing the safe use of a knife by an adult, etc.

**Community Action Head Start
Washington County, Oregon**

- Activities or lessons involving food handling must be directly supervised to minimize contamination. Tables must be cleaned and sanitized after each small group. Refer to the **Sanitation Policy & Procedure** for specific guidelines on cleaning and sanitizing surfaces.
- Food activities for children in Early Head Start should be developmentally appropriate.

Consult with Health Services Supervisor, CACFP Supervisor, or Food Services Specialist for resources and/or guidance for ideas for classroom food experiences.