Happy Mealtimes for Healthy Kids

Module 2

Putting Nutrition Ideas into Practice—Family Style Meals and Teaching Nutrition Through Activities
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Presenter’s Script and Suggested Visual Aids:

Presenter’s Note:
Suggested script flows through module. Modify the suggested script to fit your teaching style. Presenter’s notes are in bold type, shaded, and indicated by a vertical bar. Each visual aid starts a new page. A compressed version of the visual aid is included in the script. Gather the materials needed and make copies of the handouts. Decide if you will use the visual aids transparency masters to make overheads or PowerPoint to show the visuals. Make arrangements to obtain the necessary audiovisual equipment. The Presenter’s Note will give you additional information.

Introduction:
Good morning/afternoon, it is good to be offering the second in our series on Happy Mealtimes for Healthy Kids.

In our first training we discussed some challenges we face or that parents describe in feeding children. We discussed a philosophy of feeding children that outlined a division of responsibility in feeding children.
Division of Responsibility in Feeding Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adults are responsible for:</th>
<th>Children are responsible for:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Setting regular times for meals and snacks</td>
<td>• Deciding which of the healthy foods offered they want to eat</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Planning and preparing healthy meals and snacks</td>
<td>• Deciding how much food they want to eat</td>
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<td>• Assuring that the children come to the table at meal and snack times</td>
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<td>• Creating a pleasant mealtime environment</td>
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In this philosophy, adults are responsible for setting regular times for meals and snacks, planning and preparing healthy meals and snacks, assuring that the children come to the table at meal and snack times, and creating a pleasant mealtime environment.

Children are responsible for deciding which of the healthy foods offered they want to eat and deciding how much food they want to eat.

Have you had any additional thoughts or questions about this approach to feeding children since we met the last time?

Have any of you made any change in the way you offer food to children or in the kinds of conversations you have at mealtime based on our discussions?

Presenter’s Note:
Allow participants to share their thoughts or experiences.

Today we will be discussing two approaches to helping children become good eaters. Remember, our goal is not just to get food into kids today, but rather, to meet the child’s nutritional needs today and create positive eating habits that will last a lifetime. This is a high goal that will require some thought, planning, and helping the children learn some very specific skills. At the same time it is the most fun and exciting approach to teaching nutrition and learning what we can offer to children.

Today we will be discussing offering meals family style (sometimes called community style) and an approach to

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nutrition education that can be applied to our entire curriculum.

Let’s start with the concept of offering meals family style. There has been some criticism of the term family style because this certainly is not the way all families eat. But it has become a common term for offering food in serving bowls and platters and offering beverages in pitchers on the table. Children are encouraged to serve themselves or serve themselves with some assistance from adults and to pass serving dishes of food to one another.

This is an ideal way to offer food to children. The last time we met we discussed that children are often uncertain about trying new foods. They may need to see a new food eight to ten times before they want to try the food. Research has shown that children are most likely to challenge themselves to try a new food if they do not feel any pressure (from adults) to try the food. What better way to offer food to children in a non-directive way than to present the food in bowls and give the children the choice of which foods to select and to serve themselves?
The advantages of family style meals for children include:

- **Family style meals reinforce social skills**
  - Taking turns
  - Passing food in serving dishes to others
  - Saying please and thank you
  - Helping to set the table for their friends

- **Children practice serving skills**
  - Practice fine and gross motor skills to serve and pass food
  - Learn appropriate mealtime behaviors like serving without touching the food
  - Learn not to eat out of the serving dishes or off of serving utensils

- **Children feel in control of their eating**
  - Take small servings of food and take additional food later in the meal
  - Choose not to take a food initially but change their minds as the meal proceeds
  - Feel confident that additional food will be available throughout the meal

- **Indirectly encourages children to try new foods**
  - Children who feel in control of their eating are more likely to try new foods

- **Children take approximately the amounts of foods they will eat, decreasing the amount of waste**

**Presenter's Note:**
Distribute Happy Mealtimes for Healthy Kids handout 1, p. 82. Bold segments highlight points from visual aid 15 and the handout.

As you can see on our visual aid and also in your handout, there are many advantages of family style meals for children.

**Family style meals reinforce the social skills** we teach children throughout our program. Children learn to take turns, pass serving dishes of food to one another, and say please and thank you. They can also help set the table for their friends and teachers. Family style meals can be part of a very positive environment and provide an additional opportunity to reinforce important skills.

Family style meals also give children the opportunity to **practice serving skills.** Children practice both fine and gross motor skills in serving and passing food. They also learn appropriate mealtime

**Continued on next page**
The advantages of family style meals for children (continued)

behaviors like serving without touching the food and not eating off the serving plate or off the serving utensils. We often take these basic table manner skills for granted, not realizing that some children do not learn these skills at home.

Children learn to feel in control of their eating. They know that they will not be asked to eat foods they do not want and they have control over how much food they take. Children may take a small serving and take additional food later in the meal. Sometimes children are not sure they want to try something or they are not sure they will like the food. When we serve food in bowls at the table, children can take a very small amount of food without having to make a final decision about how much they want.

Another option is that children may choose not to take a food initially but change their minds as the meal proceeds. If we are serving food for children in a kitchen, the children would not have the opportunity to say no to a food and easily change their minds later. It's clear that offering food in bowls at the table gives the child the most control over his or her eating while at the same time offering healthy food choices.

It's easy to see that offering food at the table makes children feel confident that additional food will be available throughout the meal.

Family style meals indirectly encourage children to try new foods. We know that children who feel in control of their eating are more likely to try new foods. Family style meals allow children the option of trying a new food today or the next time it is offered. Children naturally challenge themselves to try new foods when they see their friends and teachers enjoying the food.

Although it takes some practice, over time children will learn to take approximately the amounts and foods they will eat and this can decrease the amount of wasted food we often see. It also allows children who want less food to leave more food for children who are more hungry on any given day. If your center participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, be sure that the minimum portion size of food is available for all children. We will discuss more about controlling portion sizes in a moment.

Teachers and staff also benefit from family style meals.
Advantages of family style meals for teachers and staff

If all of the food is available at the start of the meal, the teachers and staff can enjoy sitting with the children throughout the meal. Teachers and staff can have a more relaxed meal knowing they will not be going back to the kitchen to get extra food or be responsible for other mealtime tasks.

When the teachers and staff are sitting at the table with the children, it allows them to act as role models, demonstrating appropriate mealtime behavior for the children. When the staff and teachers are at the table, it is more likely that they can redirect behavior before it gets out of hand. This goes a long way toward maintaining a pleasant mealtime atmosphere throughout the meal.

When we have a pleasant mealtime atmosphere, it is easy to enjoy pleasant conversation with the children and establish a relaxed family-like atmosphere.

Have any of you offered food “family style” in bowls and platters on the table? How did that work for you?

Advantages of family style meals for teachers and staff

- Sitting with the children throughout the meal
- Role modeling and maintaining a pleasant mealtime atmosphere
- Enjoying conversation and a relaxed family-like atmosphere at mealtime

Continued on next page
Advantages of family style meals for teachers and staff (continued)

Presenter’s Note:
Allow participants to share both their positive and not so positive comments about family style meals. It is likely that participants will share positive experiences like:

I love it… it allows me to sit with the children and enjoy conversation and a nice meal.

The children love it. They feel so grown up and proud that they can eat the foods they want and pass food to their friends.

Children love to serve themselves and seem to eat more when they can take a second serving.

You may also hear some concerns or negative comments like:

It’s a big mess. The children I care for just can’t handle serving themselves.

It makes the meal crazy with lots of spills and children grabbing at food.

I wouldn’t mind family style except that I think it is a health hazard for children. Children put their hands on the food, cough at the table, and lick their fingers. I just don’t think it can work.

If participants do not share their thoughts, summarize comments you have heard in the past by saying something like:

I know people have had great experiences with family style meals. Teachers have told us they love family style meals. Family style meals allow them to sit with the children and enjoy conversation and a nice meal. We’ve heard that children love it. They feel so grown up and proud that they can eat like grownups and pass food to their friends. Children love to serve themselves and seem to eat more when they can take a second serving.

At the same time, some people have faced challenges in serving food family style. They are concerned that it can be messy or that the children don’t have the skills to handle serving themselves. If children are not prepared, mealtimes can be chaotic and teachers and staff will have to handle lots of spills. Finally, we sometimes hear that staff are concerned about sanitation practices, that children may touch each other’s food or eat off the serving spoon.

If participants share their thoughts, summarize their comments with the following transition.

We’ve heard some positive experiences and some not-so-positive experiences.

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Advantages of family style meals for teachers and staff (continued)

We have seen that family style meals have some real advantages for children and staff. National nutrition standards consider family style meal service, that is, serving food in bowls and platters and beverages in pitchers on the table, to be the ideal method of offering food to young children. Our goal is to plan a transition that will assure that we can be successful in offering family style meals.

The most common mistake in starting family style meals is making the decision that it’s a good idea one day and putting bowls of food on the table the next day. Guess what? It’s likely to be a disaster!

Let’s take a moment to visualize an ideal meal served family style. What would it look like? In the best of all worlds—don’t think about what could go wrong—if everything was perfect, what would serving food family style look like? Think of the perfect holiday meal or special family dinner.

Presenter’s Note:
Allow the audience to brainstorm ideas. You may want to write these on a flip chart or suggest that participants write their ideas on the Happy Mealtimes for Healthy Kids handout 1. There will be no right or wrong answers. Enthusiastically encourage more and more comments about the ideal meal.

That’s great. Some common thoughts about the ideal family style meal are that:
**Ideal family style meals**

- All the food is ready at the start of the meal.
- Everyone sits down together.
- The table looks great.
- There are serving utensils for all the food.
- Everyone is polite and waits to start eating until everyone is ready.
- Food is passed from one person to another.
- Everyone serves themselves (or serves themselves with assistance.)
- There is plenty of food.
- Everyone is happy and talking.

**Presenter’s Note:**

Review the points from the visual aid and suggest that the participants add these to their comments on the *Happy Mealtimes for Healthy Kids* handout 1.

- It’s a great image, isn’t it? Mealtime bliss!
- Now what would it take to make that happen in our center? What challenges do you think we will face?

**Presenter’s Note:**

If the center is already doing family style meals, modify your question to be, “What challenges are we facing that could improve the way we serve the children?”

Allow the participants to share their thoughts.
Visual Aid 18

Making family style meals successful

Presenter’s Note:
Bold segments highlight points from visual aid 18. Ask participants to share their ideas on other strategies for making family style meals successful.

It’s clear that to make a great mealtime, we, as adults, need to have a routine. We may need to buy some supplies since appropriate sized bowls and serving utensils can make a big difference. The children need to have a routine, and they will need to learn some specific mealtime skills. When we see family style meals that are a hassle for everyone involved, we usually find that one or more of these areas have been neglected.

Let’s go back to what we thought was an ideal family style meal and discuss what routines and skills are needed to make it happen.
Ideal family style meals

- All the food is ready at the start of the meal.
- Everyone sits down together.
- The table looks great.
- There are serving utensils for all the food.
- Everyone is polite and waits to start eating until everyone is ready.
- Food is passed from one person to another.
- Everyone serves themselves (or serves themselves with assistance.)
- There is plenty of food.
- Everyone is happy and talking.

Presenter's Note:
Bold sections highlight points from visual aid 19 and that participants may have written on their handout.

We know that it is not always easy to have all of the food ready and at the table at the start of the meal. But, if we don’t organize ourselves to have everything ready at the same time, then we will not be able to accomplish our second goal of having everyone sit down together. How difficult is it (or would it be) for us to have all the food ready and on the table at the same time at this center?

Presenter's Note:
Allow the audience to discuss the challenges they face in getting all the food ready at the same time. You may hear comments like, “the cook doesn’t always bring the food at the same time,” “sometimes the food takes a long time to heat up and we have to start without the main dish,” and “we don’t have enough staff to take care of the children and get the food ready.”

You may want to make a list of the concerns that are shared to address after the session.

One advantage of a discussion like this is that we can begin to look at ways to reschedule our time or work with our child care director and administrators to help us solve some of these challenges.

We also said one of our goals for the ideal family style meal was that the table would look great and that there would be serving utensils for all the

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food. Ideally, a staff member would check this before we sit down for the meal.

Now we begin to get into skills that our children will need to learn. We said that in the ideal family style meal everyone is polite and waits to start eating until everyone is ready. Children love to know what is expected of them, and it is always easier to teach children what’s expected of them when we talk to them about it before they have a chance to do it incorrectly. We want to take some time before we start family style meals; or if we are already serving family style, we can have these discussions before the meal. A simple discussion of how “we eat at our center” can include the concepts that we all come to the table at the same time and we wait until everyone is at the table before we start serving ourselves and passing food to our friends. Children often need to hear this information several times before they understand the new routine. We don’t expect perfect patience from the start but know that most children can learn these basic table manners when they receive supportive reinforcement on a consistent basis.

The next skill our children will need to begin to master is the skill of passing serving dishes of food from one person to another. To do this successfully requires that we have serving bowls that are small, easy to handle, and made of a material that does not become so hot that the children cannot easily pass the dish.

Small bowls are easier to pick up and pass than larger bowls. Often the same food will need to be divided into several bowls to assure that it is easy to pass and serve. Bowls with a wide rim or lip are often easier to pass and help to prevent spilling of liquid foods. Metal bowls like stainless steel, although they are durable, are really only suitable for cold foods since they become too hot to handle when filled with a hot food.

We will want to talk to children about passing bowls with two hands, holding the bowl on the outside, and not letting their fingers touch the food. We can practice these skills with empty bowls and bowls filled with dry foods even before we try passing foods during the meal. We would recommend you avoid serving platters until the children are skilled at passing food. Keeping food balanced on a serving platter is much more difficult than handling a bowl. Most foods that we would think about serving on a plate or platter can be easily served in a bowl. Sandwiches cut in half can be passed very successfully by 3-year-olds when they are served in a small bowl.

The ultimate goal of a family style meal is that everyone can serve themselves. Parents are often surprised to see their 3-year-old serving his or her own food. The children love to serve themselves, and with the right kind of training even the very young child can be successful.
A key to having children serve themselves successfully is the type of serving utensils we provide. Small scoops and tongs are easier for children to handle than long-handled spoons or sharp serving forks. One-quarter and one-half cup measuring cups with handles are often an ideal size and shape for children to manage.

One concern that we sometimes encounter in having children serve themselves is that some children may take such a large portion of a food that there is not enough left for the other children at the table. Using a measuring cup or scoop of a specific volume often has the added advantage of subtly controlling the portion size a child may take. The staff may recommend that each child take a serving of whatever food they want and that they may take additional food after everyone has been offered the food. This helps to assure that all of the children will be offered the food.

Plastic tongs are an easy way for children to pick up foods. Practice in picking up items with tongs before the meal can help children feel comfortable in handling the tongs during the meal.

Pouring skills have long been a part of fine motor skills practiced in the preschool setting. We usually begin with pouring water during outdoor play or practice pouring skills with sand or beans. If we carefully select small pitchers and consider small pitchers with lids and pouring spouts for the young child, we can easily make the transition to having the children pour their own beverages at mealtime. Some centers have been successful at having children pour their own milk by using the standard milk carton as the pitcher. Children are encouraged to pour their milk into a glass. Once this has been mastered, they can move to slightly larger pitchers that are shared at the table.

Of course we do not expect all children to master these skills at the same rate. We know that some children will be able to serve themselves with assistance from the staff.

Another goal we have for family style meals is that there is plenty of food. It’s difficult to relax and enjoy a meal if you are worried that you may not be able to get enough to eat. We have also said that for children to learn lifelong eating habits, they need to feel in control of their eating. They need to be assured that if they don’t want a food initially, they can change their minds during the meal, or if they decide they want more food, that most of the time it will be available.

The challenges we face in running a center are three-fold. First, if we participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program we want to assure that all children are offered the minimum portion size of all of the required meal components so that we can receive reimbursement for the meal. Second, we...
know that financially we cannot offer an unlimited amount of all foods. Third, because we care about children, we want to be sure that children do not leave the table hungry.

One way to meet these challenges is to assure that at least the minimum portion size (for the Child and Adult Care Food Program) of all food is available at the table at the start of the meal. Check with your Child and Adult Care Food Program State Agency to assure that you are following the regulations as they are interpreted in your state. Serving utensils or scoops should meet the minimum portion size for the food. This is usually ¼ cup each for two fruits and vegetables at lunch and supper or ½ cup of fruits or vegetables at breakfast and snacks for the 3- to 5-year-old child. Most states interpret this as 3 years through the child's 5th year of age—or until their 6th birthday. The staff should be fully trained on the serving size of the meat and bread items for the age group. The staff can then suggest that each child take a single serving as they pass the food around. This will assure that all children are offered all of the foods and that the minimum portion size is offered. Additional servings of most of the foods should be available for second servings. Although we cannot assure that an unlimited amount of all foods will be available, we should be able to assure that children will have a choice of several foods for a second and even a third serving so that their appetites can be satisfied. Adjustments should be made in the amount of food purchased and prepared to assure that enough food is available to meet each child's individual appetite and nutritional needs.

Finally, when we talked about the ideal family style meal, we said that everyone is happy and talking. Mealtimes should be fun and pleasant for everyone! The first two goals we discussed for family style meals were having all of the food ready at the start of the meal and having everyone sit down together. It's obvious that if we are going to be available to assist children in . . .

• serving themselves,
• modeling the type of behaviors we want to see at the table,
• gently redirecting behavior that may not be ideal, and
• assuring that all children are offered food

. . . the staff need to be sitting with the children from the start of the meal. If we get behind in preparing for the meal or if we need to leave the table unattended, we can only expect that the children will not have an ideal mealtime experience.

We also need to expect spills! We've seen that the skills we learn in order to develop healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime are complicated. Children need time to learn passing and pouring skills, and little distractions can cause those inevitable spills. Little accidents should be handled in a relaxed matter-of-fact way. Children should never be
reprimanded or criticized for spills at the table. Child-size sponges and small pails of soapy water make cleanup easy and fun for the children. We have even seen miniature mops used by the children to clean up spills on the floor. We don’t expect cleanup to be perfect. Sopping up a spill of milk or drying the floor to prevent slipping is really all that is necessary to continue a relaxed and pleasant meal. Full cleanup can be done by the staff after the meal has been completed.

We have spent most of today talking about how to make family style meals successful and stress free. We know family style meals BENEFIT KIDS AND STAFF!

During our last nutrition session and for most of today we have been talking about feeding practices that support a sense of the child’s being in control of his or her eating.

We’ve discussed a division of responsibility in feeding children that support adults’ being responsible for setting regular meal and snack times, planning healthy meals, and assuring that the children come to the table at mealtime. Children are responsible for deciding which of the healthy foods offered they want to eat and how much they want to eat.

Today we have discussed family style meals and creating a pleasant mealtime environment. We have reviewed the planning we need to do and the skills that children need to master to make family style meals a success.

**Presenter’s Note:**
In the Resources Section, you will find a Suggested Demonstration List, p. 88 that gives a list of different items to view and share. You may choose to bring some of the items listed and ask for comments from participants. This is an ideal time to recap the discussion.

You may also want to ask participants to review the Family Style Mealtime Checklist, *Happy Mealtimes for Healthy Kids* handout 2. Encourage participants to write any additional comments on the handout. You may also choose to distribute and discuss the Family Handout “Family Meals Good Nutrition and So Much More,” p. 84 and the Family Letter, p. 85. You can use these to send to parents or as a review for participants.

**Presenter’s Note:**
This portion of the presentation/discussion is intended to take approximately 30 minutes. You may continue to complete the presentation, which will take approximately another 30 minutes, or you may stop the presentation here and complete the second half of Module 2 during another 30-minute session.
Teaching nutrition through activities

Now we can shift our attention to how we can increase the chances that a child will want to eat a new food. We know that a direct approach of coaxing a child to eat takes control away from the children in making their own food choices. Our goal is to incorporate food and nutrition into our center/preschool activities. We know that the more food activities children participate in, the more likely they are to want to try the food in the future.

We sometimes forget that food and nutrition activities can go beyond food tasting and cooking activities in the classroom.

One way to think about nutrition education in the classroom is to think about teaching nutrition through different activities. We have a variety of simple ways to increase children’s exposure to new foods and nutrition concepts through our curriculum.

Teaching nutrition through activities can take a variety of forms. We could teach nutrition from stories like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *The Three Bears*, or Oliver’s *Vegetable Garden*. Children often learn about nutrition through role play like playing restaurant or chef or through food tasting activities. An alternative to full cooking activities is to allow the children to help with the final steps of food preparation. We often call this food assembly activities. If all of the ingredients are prepared, it is simple for children to make individual salads or their own tacos. We certainly would not want to neglect full-blown cooking activities like making muffins or soup. We can also teach nutrition through art projects and gardening and incorporate nutrition into pre-reading, sequencing, counting, and math skills. Teaching nutrition around cultural diversity and geography is always fun and makes the culture and different places in the world really come alive.
Let’s brainstorm about how we could incorporate nutrition into our center’s activities/preschool curriculum.

Presenter’s Note:
This portion of the discussion can be handled in several ways:
Ask the group to break into small groups and discuss one or two of the teaching nutrition through activities categories. Ask them to report back on activities they could do with the children and what foods or nutrition concepts the children would be exposed to. For example, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* could be used to launch a discussion of why we eat and what foods help us grow and change.

or

Bring in a variety of nutrition activity and story books. Ask the participants to select a book to review. They can then report on what they thought of the book and how they might use it in a classroom setting with the children. A Book List is provided in the Resources Section, p. 89. These books can serve as a guide. You may find similar books in your center or in the public library.

Allow participants 10-15 minutes for discussion or review. When the time is up, ask the participants to report to the group.

We have certainly seen and heard a variety of ways that we can incorporate nutrition into our center’s curriculum. The next challenge is to find the time to do these nutrition activities on a regular basis. We have a number of advantages to incorporating nutrition into other subject areas like story time, math, and geography. Nutrition often makes the subject come alive for our children. They see a real connection between themselves and the subject. Our staff see a real advantage because they offer children multiple educational opportunities with a single activity.

Are there any additional comments about our brief session on Teaching Nutrition through Activities?

Presenter’s Note:
Allow participants an opportunity to respond.

Over the past two nutrition sessions we have covered a huge amount of material in child nutrition. We have discussed our challenges. We have discussed a philosophy of feeding children that outlines a division of responsibility that can reassure us that child nutrition is not a complicated battleground, but really follows a commonsense approach. We then moved on to a discussion of family style meals with emphasis on how we need to organize our time and purchase the right serving utensils to make family

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meals a reality in a center setting. We also discussed the skills our children can master to make family style meals simple and successful. Finally, we have reviewed ways to incorporate nutrition education into our curriculum. We know that the more ways children are exposed to new foods the more likely they are to want to eat them.

The ultimate goal of all of this is better nutrition for our children. We have said over and over that we want to meet our children’s nutritional needs today and create good eating habits that will last a lifetime.

Although this is our last of this two-module series we hope this is just the beginning of our conversations about good nutrition for our children.

**Presenter’s Note:**
If you are planning to use the Optional Participant Post Training Evaluation, “Practicing What We Learned”, p. 86, pass it out and have participants complete it. You may choose to collect it or not.