

# Implementing Family-Style Food Service

The term “family style meals” typically refers to meal service where adults and children eat together and children (after age two) serve themselves from multi-portion platters or bowls. Eating family style at school has many advantages. It is a great way for children to learn self-help skills, decision-making, table manners, appropriate food portions, conversation skills, and how to share food and cooperate with others. During family style meals it is expected that the teacher sits at the table and eats with the children. This is a great time for teachers to talk about ideas that interest the children, and model good nutrition, appropriate eating habits, and table manners. Children can be encouraged to help with setting the table (passing out plates, utensils, cups, and napkins) and clearing their own items when done. They can also help by clearing the family style plates back to the kitchen. Learning and practicing self-help skills such as these are also an important part of family style meals and snacks.

There must be enough food in each bowl or on each plate to serve each child at the table the correct serving amount. Bowls and plates may not be passed from table to table. Child and Adult Care Food Program requirements state that children at each table must have their own platters. There should be a serving piece for the children to place the food on to their plate. **A child may not use his or her own fork or spoon to serve the food.** Furthermore, Arizona Child Care Licensing rules require that milk be poured from its original container; consequently, using small pitchers of milk that children are better able to pour is not permitted. Also, a container of milk placed on the table is considered “served” and must be discarded.

Some guidelines for family style meals include:

- Handwashing! Adults and children should wash their hands with soap and water before setting the table or coming to the table to eat.
- Safety first. Assure that finger foods and serving bowls are not too hot for children to handle.
- Make sure serving bowls or platters are not too big. If the serving dishes are big or heavy or slippery, the caregiver can hold the bowl while children serve themselves.
- Use a textured mat under stationary serving dishes to prevent slipping.
- Make sure serving utensils are the right size and easy for small hands to operate.
- When children place serving utensils in their mouths, sneeze on them or otherwise contaminate them, the utensils must be changed out immediately.
- Any ready-to-eat food must be handled by teachers wearing single use non latex gloves.
- Each bowl or plate must have its own serving utensil to prevent cross contamination. If you use reusable utensils, they must be washed in a 3 compartment sink or commercial dishwasher
- You must have a specific cloth that is used only for wiping up food spills.
- Open food that is placed on the table with children must be discarded when the meal is complete.
- Unopened packages of food may be reused.

## More Ideas

- Encourage use of those “magic words” *please* and *thank you* as items are passed and received.
- Encourage children to taste each food, but do not force them to eat any food. It may take many times being exposed to a food before a child is willing to accept it.
- Help children learn appropriate serving sizes. Caregivers can review age-appropriate portion sizes in the Meal Pattern Guidelines developed by the Child and Adult Care Food Program of the USDA, and then show children what that serving size looks like on a plate.