

MEAL TIME POLICY

Policy: All Early Head Start and Head Start children and assigned classroom staff eat together, family style, at all meals/snacks.

1. All staff and children will wash their hands with soap and warm running water, using proper technique, before coming to the table for a meal. All children will be instructed to wash their hands again if their hands are used to cover coughing or sneezing or to wipe their nose.
2. Children will be involved with setting the table and meal preparation activities as much as possible. Children's safety and food safety will be closely monitored by adults.
3. At least the minimum portion of food, milk and other beverages for all children and adults at a table, per CACFP guidelines, will be placed on the table in serving bowls and pitchers. There will be separate serving portions for each table with serving utensils distinct from eating utensils.
4. Appropriate staff/child ratios and group sizes shall be maintained at meal time.
5. Meal service shall be family style so that all children and adults may serve themselves as they are able. A supervising adult must be seated at each table. Children who can serve themselves will be allowed to choose which foods they place on their plates. Children should be encouraged to take and try all foods, but should not be forced or cajoled into doing so. Food will not be used as a punishment or a reward.
6. Adult staff will ensure that all children who are unable to serve themselves will have the minimum portion of each component placed on their plates or receive assistance or accommodations that allow them to place food on their plates. Accommodations will be made for children with special needs (i.e. disabilities, medical feeding issues, etc.).
7. Meal counts are taken at the *point of service* which is *just as the last children sits down to eat **with a complete reimbursable meal on the table** and before the first child leaves the table.*
8. Adults will eat the same meal as the children. Adults will not bring their own food or beverages to the table at meal/snack time. If adults are allergic to milk or are lactose intolerant, they may drink water or a milk substitute (Lactaid, soy milk, rice milk) that they provide themselves.
9. Adults eat with children to model appropriate meal time behavior which includes proper table manners, trying all foods and not making negative comments about the foods served. Adults need to remember to take small portions (see CACFP portion guidelines) to ensure that there is plenty of food for the children. All staff are given time off for lunch breaks, children do not have this opportunity.
10. Meal time is an excellent time to help children learn about food and simple nutrition concepts and meal time conversation may be directed at such.
11. If milk, or another item, is accidentally spilled during a meal, children will be shown how to clean up after themselves. Children will also be involved in clean-up after meals. It is important that adults are attentive when children are scraping their meal scraps into the garbage, especially at the first of the year and the routine is new, to ensure that dishes, glasses and silverware are not thrown away.
12. All food that has been on the table during a meal/snack shall be discarded after the meal/snack. Food that was not brought out of the kitchen will be labeled with the date and discarded after 36 hours. No food should be taken from the center by staff or anyone else. This includes taking leftovers home, sending

children home with a meal or snack and staff who are not eating with children fixing themselves a plate of food before children have finished eating.

13. Staff will make note of new or atypical child behavior during meal time in order to share that information with parents. Items of note may include refusal to eat, tasting of a new food, consumption of larger than normal amounts of food for a particular child, etc.

14. While milk is required to be served at meals, water must be available at meal times and throughout the day for children to drink upon request. Adults should offer water to children at meal time, after milk has been consumed. Water should be served at snack when no other beverage is on the menu.

15. Forks and spoons should be offered on the table for most breakfast and lunch meals. Often, the snack served may not require any utensil at all. Classroom and kitchen staff should not assume which utensil a child is most comfortable with, but have both spoons and forks available and allow the child to choose. After winter break or once the children have developed their fine motor coordination, the cooks will offer knives at meals where children would have the opportunity to practice cutting (pancakes, peaches and pear slices, etc.). In addition, cooks may serve butter, cream cheese and peanut butter/Sunbutter in dishes with knives available, to allow children to experiment with the skills of spreading and cutting. At times, children's behavior may make knife use unsafe. It is important for teachers and cooks to communicate the best way to ensure safety while allowing developmentally ready children to explore the use of knives at mealtime.