

Family Style Dining

What are the basics of family style dining?

One teacher sits when the first child sits.

Licensing requires that we serve water at every snack and mealtime. You may choose to have a pitcher or water in addition to your milk pitcher, or you may ask your children to bring water bottles from home.

Children begin to serve and pass food & milk as soon as they sit down. When children have poured their milk, they can drink. When they have food on their plate, they can eat. It is extremely important to eliminate waiting. The entire meal is served at once. Milk and fruit are not saved until last. Children are not forced to eat.

Teachers sit and eat with children. Teachers put all types of food on their plates, and try each. Teachers do not eat foods not on the menu in front of children or drink soda in front of the children. Teachers casually discuss the lunch foods in a relaxed atmosphere. Teachers offer each food, and assure that children have the opportunity to self-serve each type of food. During the meal, teachers assist children from a seated position. This requires that the items you need be in reach.

If a child has a spill, the child is encouraged to clean it up without any penalty being attached. The child should not feel she is in trouble.

Mess and wait time can also be reduced by having child-sized metal serving spoons and milk pitchers that are not full. Partner with your chef to be sure that you're getting the supplies you need – one bowl of each item per table, child-sized pitchers for milk and water, etc.

At the end of the meal one teacher rise as the first child does to help with hand washing. The second teacher remains at the table until the last child is finished.

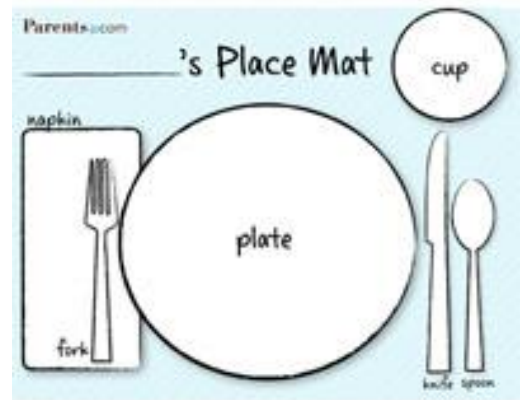
What is family style meal service?

- Family style meal service is a dining experience in which children and adults sit together at a table for a meal or snack. Family style meal service encourages children to make healthy meal food choices based on observing positive attitude and modeling of the adult.
- Family style meal service means serving food in bowls or dishes that can be easily manipulated by the children and remain on the table during meal service times. Children are encouraged to serve themselves, with assistance from the adult only when needed. Although implementation techniques may vary, family style meal service can be implemented for children as young as toddlers.
- There are three components of family meal service:

- Food preparation – It is essential that the meals prepared are “family-service” friendly. Food should arrive to the classroom in child-size serving dishes accompanied with appropriate serving utensils. Milk should be provided in child-size pitchers that can be easily handled.
- Table setting – the children should be responsible for creating their mealtime environment; the adult should provide guidance, but allow the children to prepare the tables independently for meal times.
- Self Service – After watching the adult model self-service, the children will independently serve themselves. Adult assistance should only be provided if needed.

Placemat Guides

Creating a placemat guide such as the photo to the right can be a useful learning tool when encouraging the children to set the tables to engage in family style meal service. The guides should reflect the materials used in the classroom or can be a general outline of each material (labeling can be used as well to better identify each object). Placemats guides should not be used as an assigned seating tool or reproduced per child; one copy per table may be useful tool in guidance successful table setting practices for children.



What does family style meal service look like in the classroom?

- The children set the table providing a plate, spoon, fork, napkin and a cup for each child (can be a job on the helper chart)
- The children are transitioned to the table, and are not sitting at the table waiting for lunch to arrive
- The teacher is sitting at the table with the children (preferable in the middle to allow better mobility in helping children pass the food or serve as needed, and she is visible to all children to model “serving”) the teacher should be present through the duration of the meal (each situation is unique and teachers should gauge actual timing and the table per their classroom needs)
- The teacher models serving by serving herself first while verbalizing about the meal and the portions being served
- The children are serving themselves and are passing the serving dishes once they are finished.
- The teacher and the children are engaged in conversation, the teacher is creating a meal time climate of communication by asking open ended questions and encouraging the children to use table manners (please pass the ..., thank you, would you like more milk?, etc ...)
- Children are encouraged to clean up spills and teachers expect them to happen
- Children are not forced to sit at the table until everyone is done, but are aware of the daily routine and are able to clear their place and engage in planned activities when they are done eating.

Tip for Facilitating Conversation

- Ask about past events (ex: Can you tell me about a time when you had food like this at home?)
- Create opportunities for pretend (ex: what if you were planning a big birthday dinner for your mom, what would you have?)
- Seek opportunities to verbalize choices and encourage problem solving among peers (ex: Mary would like to have the beans, but it looks like you are not done with them, can you talk to Mary about that?)