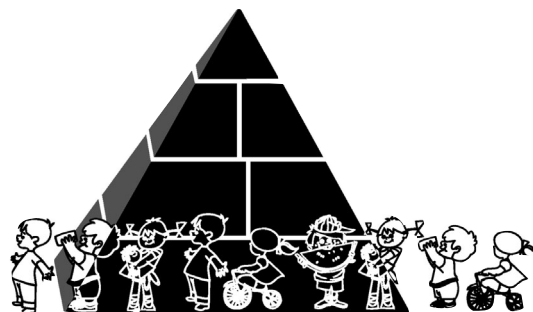


# Mealtime Memo

FOR CHILD CARE



2003

## Serving Meals Family-Style



Family-style meal service provides a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere where children feel free to talk with each other.

Family-style meals may also have a very positive effect on the picky eater. When children sit together and serve themselves, the picky eater may see others accepting foods and want to try the foods as well. The adult may need to encourage the picky eater to taste the food.

### Introducing family-style meals

To help familiarize children with the family-style meal service, allow them to pretend to eat at a table with other children during play or center time.

- Provide a table and play dinnerware; show the children the proper way to set the table, keeping food safety in mind (if the cup falls on the floor, it must be washed).
- Discuss with children the proper way to serve food themselves, taking proper amounts and a variety of food, what to do in case of spills, cleaning up after the meal, table manners, and etiquette.
- Reinforce etiquette such as using “please” and “thank you” and being aware that everyone has been served before eating.

Young children grow more independent every day, wanting to make decisions for themselves. Serving family-style meals is a great way to allow children the freedom to make decisions and develop their own personalities. Family-style meals can be defined as meals in which child-size tables are set with plates and utensils. Food is passed in small containers for children to serve their own plates. Children may pour their own beverages from small pitchers. The positive effects of this type of meal service for children include: building lifetime skills, taking part in the entire meal from preparation to cleanup, and enjoying a meal setting that is comfortable and relaxing.

### Positive aspects of family-style meal service

The family-style meal service offers many advantages to children’s developmental process by enhancing:

- Motor skills
- Language
- Self-esteem
- Social skills
- Table manners
- Independence

Children develop these skills through interaction with adults and other children.

Motor skills are developed by children serving plates themselves and passing food dishes to others. Social skills and language may be developed through light conversation at the table. The adult at the table can encourage language development by talking about the food provided, where it comes from, good eating habits, and proper table manners. The fam-

### Using family-style meals

Children enjoy helping with “grown up” activities. Let them assist with each of the four components of family-style meals as it will boost their self-esteem. The four components are:

- Table setting
- Self-serve
- Food preparation
- Cleanup

Begin with something simple like table setting. Then allow children to help with a small snack, and always encourage them to clean up after themselves.

**Regulations regarding family-style meal service vary from state to state. Contact your state agency for more information on serving meals family-style.**



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Remember these tips when using the family-style meal service:

- ▲ Children should wash hands before helping with the meal and sitting down to eat. The adult can model this behavior by washing hands with the children.
- ▲ Children should never handle raw meats. Allow them to arrange prepared food on a tray, mix the salad, or set the table.
- ▲ Be careful of cross-contamination. Make sure that surfaces have been properly cleaned before the children arrive to help. And, hands should be washed after handling each food item.

- ▲ Make sure that sharp knives have been put away.
- ▲ Wash hands after cleanup.

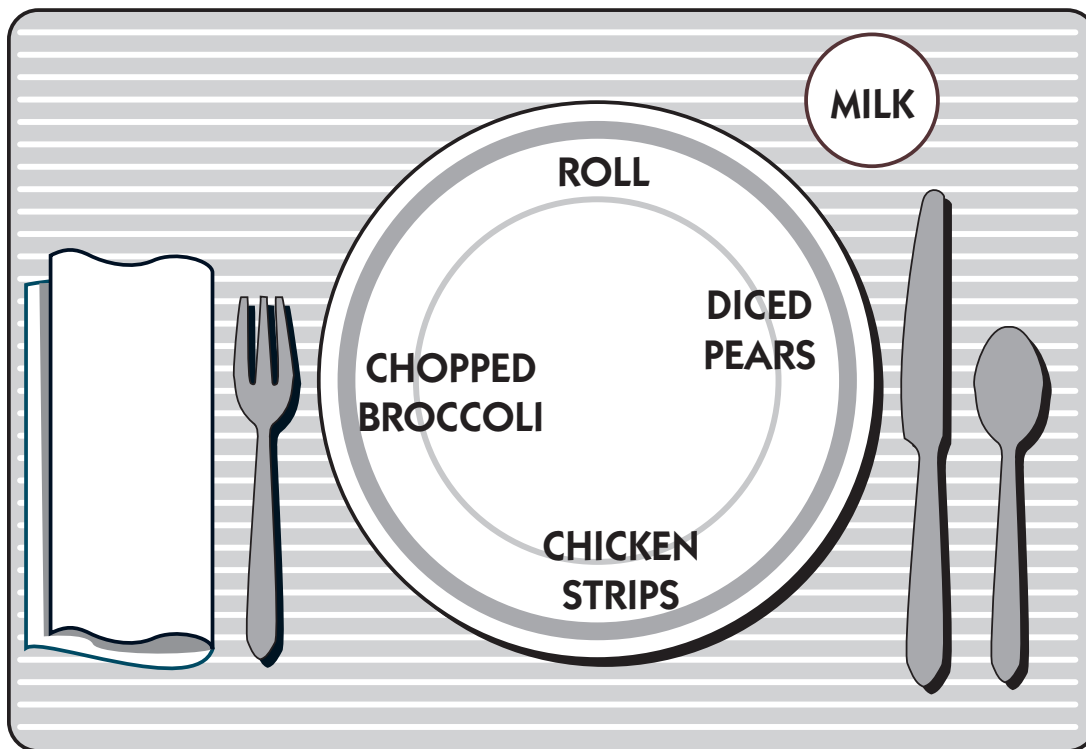
Adults play an important role in assisting with mealtime skills. During the meal it is the responsibility of the adult to offer meal components. Actively encourage children to take all components in proper amounts.

Family-style meal service takes time, but persistence results in children who are more relaxed and who will develop lifetime skills at an early age.

## Place Mat Learning

**Directions:** Use an image such as the one below or enlarge the image to provide for the following activities:

1. When laminated, use the placemat as a visual for children to know exactly where to place items when setting the table.
2. As a reinforcement activity, this placemat can be a creative art project. Allow the children to cut food items out of a magazine and glue the cut items onto the plate. Discuss variety, color, and portion sizes with children.



## Additional Resources:

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. (2001). *Feeding children responsively to develop healthy eating habits*. Denver, CO: Author.

National Food Service Management Institute. (2003). *From the trainer's tablet: Lessons for family/home child care providers*. [only available on Web] Retrieved May 21, 2003, from <http://www.nfsmi.org/Information/from-the-trainer.html>

National Food Service Management Institute. (1998). *More than mud pies: A nutrition curriculum guide for preschool children* (3rd ed.). University, MS: Author.

Team Nutrition Iowa. (2001). *Physical activities and healthy snacks for young children*. Retrieved March 18, 2003, from <http://www.iptv.org/rtl/presentation.cfm#pdf>

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