Feeding Children in Child Care

Family-style dining gives children the opportunity to take and eat as much food as they want during meals and snacks. The intent behind feeding in the CACFP is that all children get enough food to meet their nutrient and energy needs.

Family-style dining teaches children:

- choosing from well-balanced and nutritious meals
- how to serve themselves
- eating how much they choose to eat
- trying new foods
- the skills of eating at a table with others
- following positive role models
- table manners
- good eating habits
- positive relationships with food

In family-style dining, providers are responsible for ***what, when, where*** and create a setting that supports pleasant and positive mealtimes. The child is responsible for ***how much*** and ***whether.***

Help children "listen" to their own bodies to know how much to eat.

- Only the children can decide how hungry they are. As adults, we often want to anticipate how much a child should eat. We make these decisions based on how much the child ate yesterday or how much other children the child's age or size often eat.
- Research has shown that many children are extremely good at deciding when they are hungry and full. *When adults interfere by encouraging children to eat more than they want or by limiting the amount of food offered to children, we undermine their internal cues and encourage overeating later in life. Note: There is no correlation between a chubby baby/child and obesity later in life, but there's a correlation between restricted feeding and obesity.*
- The nutrient needs of children differ because of individual body size, growth pattern, and activity level. Variations in the components and the serving sizes for each component of the meal pattern are based on these differences.
- The amounts required in the meal pattern are minimum requirements that must be served. Some children may need larger servings than the meal pattern shows.

The meal patterns for the CACFP help make menu planning easier. **Child care providers must serve meals that provide enough calories to grow and to play**. Use the meal patterns to plan well-balanced meals that meet children's nutrient and energy needs. Keep in mind that children know how much they need to eat. Some children will need larger portions than the minimums required in the meal pattern. Other children with small appetites at lunch will benefit from a nutritious afternoon snack. Each child decides how much to eat. Children cannot go wrong with whatever they choose to eat when healthy meals and snacks are offered.

References: Ellyn Satter & The National Food Service Management Institute