Benefits of Eating as a Group

Mealtime is often the only time of the day when people can talk, laugh, and reconnect as a group. Studies show that regular group meals are linked to:

- Higher academic achievement
- Greater self-esteem
- Enhanced vocabulary and social skills
- Lower rates of obesity and eating disorders

Practical Ways to Enhance Mealtime

So how do you make the most of this time that has the potential to impact the children you care for in such big ways?

- **Experience mealtime with them.** It is tempting to use the children’s mealtime to catch up on other tasks such as dishes, preparing for the next activity, or tidying up. Instead, sit with the children at the table and actually eat the meal with them. This seemingly simple act can have great impact and encourages appropriate behavior and eating habits. When you pay attention to children and encourage them to communicate with you and each other, you help them form a positive view of themselves and the world that they live in. Create a space for conversations that lead to learning and mutual respect. Consider turning off the TV and putting away your phone. Make eye contact with them and really pay attention to what they have to say. When you are engaged, they will be too!

- **Model the behavior you wish to see.** As a child care provider, you have the ability to be a positive example to the children. Children pick up on their role models’ attitudes about food. For this reason, it might be easier to enjoy mealtime in front of the TV or simply let the children eat whenever and wherever they want. But what if there were simple and practical ways to enhance the mealtime experience for you and the children? This issue of Tasty Times will look at the benefits of eating a meal at the table with no distractions and enjoying the company of others at the table.

Lacey Pezley, Dietetic Intern
(for John R. Gadient, RD/LDN, Supervisor)
Tell Us When the Children Are Out of School

It is important to either state on your CIF (Claim Information Form) or enter into the computer school days off in your calendar. You will not get reimbursed for the children in your care for “out of school days” if you don’t provide that information.

Healthy Food Program Number

For the Out of Home voicemail, payment information or to speak to a customer service representative:

Call: (773) 564-8861

Benefits of Eating as a Group  Continued

One of the most powerful ways to get a child to try new foods is to eat and enjoy those foods yourself. Try to avoid labeling food as “good” or “bad,” but rather allow for all foods in moderation. This maintains a healthy attitude toward food and prevents a desire to overeat certain restricted foods when they are given the chance. Modeling a healthy relationship to food will set children up for success as they grow and begin to make food choices on their own. Remember research shows children need to be offered new foods 10-15 times before they will try it. Instead of showing frustration and placing pressure on the child to eat, simply offer them healthy foods and be patient as they consider trying them.

- Make mealtime an activity to look forward to. Children love to laugh and play. Allow them to express and be themselves, while at the same time respecting table manners. One way to do this is by letting the children be part of the entire mealtime process. They may be able to help prepare some of the food items and set the table. It’s alright if it doesn’t look perfect! When you sit down to eat, encourage the children to notice the shapes and colors of the food on their plate. Talk with them about where food comes from and how it got to the table.

- Try playing a game such as “I Spy.”

Some ideas for this game include:

- I spy the green vegetable! Can you find it?
- I spy a round and small fruit!
- I spy something brown!
- I spy a food that is crunchy!

Child Care Home Reviews

The Illinois State Board of Education will be conducting unannounced child care home reviews during meal times this spring. If you receive a visit, always check for identification and feel free to call us if you are doubtful of the person at your door. You or your assistant cannot ask the ISBE monitor to come back later; you or your assistant must conduct the review. The purpose of the ISBE review is to monitor Illinois Action for Children’s Healthy Food Program. ISBE is required to do this for all food programs by the United States Department of Agriculture. Be sure to call us if you are going to be closed or away during a meal-time, and we will inform the ISBE monitor if he or she is at your door and you do not answer.

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