

CHILDREN BENEFIT WHEN SERVED FAMILY STYLE MEALS

By Gail Kreczkowski

Despite today's demanding lifestyles, family style meal service is still prevalent among families with children. Family style meal service provides an opportunity to encourage good eating habits at a young age. Family style meal service provides further opportunity to enhance these goals by encouraging a pleasant eating environment that will support and promote mealtime as a learning experience.

Family style is a type of meal service that allows children to serve themselves at the table from common dishes of food with the assistance of an adult.

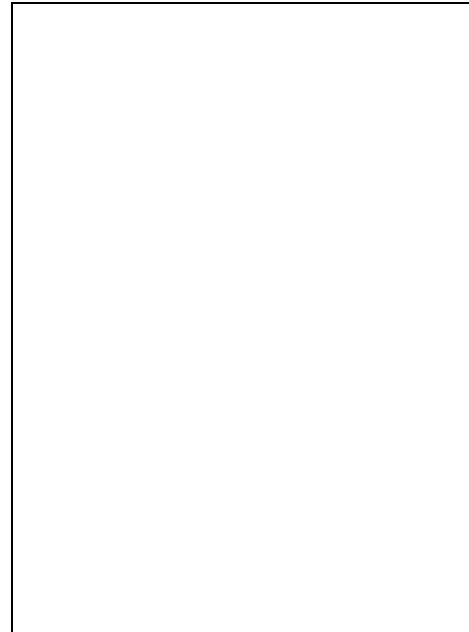
Family style encourages adults to set a personal example and provide educational activities that are centered around foods. This approach allows children to identify, and be introduced to new foods, new tastes, and new menus while developing a positive attitude towards nutritious foods, sharing in group situations, and developing good eating habits.

Introducing new foods can be educational experience. Foods, like a bright orange, a rosy apple, or a bright green pepper, can be an introduction to new colors and different textures and smells. A child may reject a food simply because it is unfamiliar. Seeing, touching, tasting new foods, and preparing familiar foods in different ways can lead to better acceptance.

The most important part of a meal is meeting the nutritional needs of the child. A healthful diet offers a variety of foods, which are low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol and are moderate in sugar and salt. Consider Dietary Guidelines recommendations (variety, lowfat, increased grains, fruits and vegetables).

Let children be involved in the meal preparation. Have children measure ingredients with real kitchen measuring cups and spoons. Teach children the origin of foods and the events that lead up to serving a meal. Plant a window garden, inside or out, or create an edible landscape with herbs.

A pleasant eating environment is another important key to healthy eating. Bringing children and foods together in a happy meal setting is as important as what children should eat. Pleasant eating experiences form habits and attitudes during the preschool years that can last a lifetime.



Encourage good experiences with food and eating:

- Get to know your child's personality and reaction to foods.
- Allow your children to do as much as they can for themselves.
- Allow your children to take their own time to eat. Let them follow their own "time clock." Eating in a hurry may spoil the pleasure of a meal.

What are the benefits of serving family style? It benefits children in many ways. Children can learn motor skills and advance development in motor coordination. Children develop social and communication skills. Best of all, children and families have an opportunity during mealtime to spend quality time together.

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