Benefits and Steps for Family-Style Dining

Developmental Benefits: The Importance of Family-Style Dining

Positive effects of family-style dining on a child's development.

- **Small and Large Muscle Development (motor development)**
  - Encourages children to serve themselves, which develops their eye-hand coordination.
  - Encourages coordination of body movement to move chair, sit, and stand from chair.
  - Helps children learn manipulation of utensils.

- **Language/Communication Development**
  - Promotes the rules of language (how to participate in interactions with language) through listening and participating in conversations.
  - Exposes infants and toddlers to a variety of vocabulary.
  - Allows participation in adult-child exchanges and the following of directions.
  - Promotes peer-to-peer exchanges.

- **Emotional Development**
  - Promotes a sense of competence. This is an indicator of infant and toddler emotional development. The child recognizes his or her ability to do things.
  - Promotes self-awareness. This is an indicator of infant and toddler emotional development. The child recognizes himself or herself as a person with an identity, wants, needs, interests, likes, and dislikes.
  - Encourages impulse control. This is part of a child's emotional development. Infants early on show signs of controlling some impulses when supported by a care teacher. By 36 months, a toddler has internalized some rules so he or she doesn't always need as much support when trying to control his or her behavior.

- **Social Development**
  - Allows time for conversations about food, the events of the day, the events to come, and things that occurred at home—conversations that can happen by the time children are toddlers.
  - Encourages interactions with adults and peers.
  - Promotes social identity, an indicator of infant and toddler social development. The child has increasing awareness of his or her relationship to others in the group.

- **Cognitive Development**
  - Promotes use of tools and problem solving through manipulation of utensils.
  - Promotes imitation, the ability to repeat and practice actions modeled by another.
The Look of Family-Style Dining

- Eat in small groups at child-size table and chairs (adult may use adult-size chair). Care teachers sit with children.

- Realize the smaller the group, the less hectic the meal.

- Eat the same food that is served to children at same time children eat. (This should not be the care teacher’s lunch break.)

- Encourage self-serving, and assist if help is needed. If children are unable to feed themselves, then they are not developmentally ready to serve food to themselves.

- Set tables with serving platters, bowls, and milk pitchers all small enough to be managed by toddlers so they can serve themselves.

- Consider that children enjoy helping to set the table and serving themselves.

- Encourage social interactions and conversation. Talk about the food (temperature, taste, color, shape, size, quantity) and events of the day. Do not make it a “quiz.” Ask open-ended questions, not “yes or no” questions.

- Follow the child’s lead on conversation topics.

- Provide extra help and allow for time for slow eaters.