

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.