



# Family Style Dining in Early Care

*Family style dining is encouraged by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association and many other national groups as a best practice for children in early care environments. The Kentucky Department for Public Health recognizes the best practice and supports family style dining when done safely and appropriately.*

## BENEFITS

### Prevents Children from Overeating

By teaching them to portion out their own serving size in response to internal hunger and fullness cues, children can learn healthy habits from an early age.

### Promotes Nutrition Education

As teachers converse about food taste, texture, color and shape, children learn valuable information about the nourishment they need.

### Promotes Motor Skill Development

When children practice passing, pouring, spooning and serving meal components they are physically exercising fine and gross motor skills.

### Promotes Social Development

By teaching table manners, independence, and how to share pleasant conversation at meal time, children develop important social and emotional life skills.

## HELPFUL TIPS

- Establish rules and share them with the children. Try these to start: “Do not touch the food in the bowl with your hand,” and “do not eat off your neighbors’ plate.”
- Practice serving and passing with children by using bowls of dry beans, dry rice or pitchers of water in learning centers or circle time prior to beginning family style dining.
- Start small with one item or at snack time using easy to serve foods. Expand to other foods one at a time.
- Get parent and staff support for family style dining before making the switch.
- Use appropriately sized serving dishes and utensils. Try serving bowls with wide lips, small serving spoons, tongs or measuring cups.
- Serve food in multiple small containers with only a few servings in each container. This will limit food waste if a dish is contaminated or spilled.
- Keep extra serving utensils on hand in case someone drops or inappropriately touches the food.
- Keep paper towels and napkins nearby for quick clean up if there are spills.

# Food Safety Considerations

Basic sanitation guidelines and food safety regulations maintain a healthy food environment for all diners. The following tips will help prevent contamination and the possible spread of disease.

## SERVING GUIDELINES



- Supervising adults should be seated and dining with the children.
- In accordance with 922 KAR 2:120, children and adults must wash their hands prior to meal service.
- Serving utensils, not bare hands, should be used at all times when serving food. These include tongs, spoons, scoops, measuring cups and deli paper. If these are not available, food service gloves should be used.
- Utensils must be properly passed between users. It is generally recommended that they be placed in the serving bowl with the handle extending outward.
- A child serving another child is not recommended.

## WHEN TO DISCARD FOOD



- If a child or adult sneezes, coughs or places their hand in a serving bowl, the food must be discarded and the serving bowl replaced with a clean one.
- Milk served from a pitcher must be thrown away after meal service.
- Any uncovered foods on the table, such as margarine, cannot be served again to the children and should be thrown away after the meal service.
- Any uneaten food from the family style meal service that has been placed on the table or any uneaten portions of foods that are in the unsafe temperature zone for more than four hours should be discarded after meal service.

## WHEN TO ALTER FAMILY STYLE DINING



- Children or adults with draining wounds or sores that are not properly bandaged should be excluded from family style meals. Proper bandage includes a dry, durable, tight fitting bandage.
- If a child is showing signs of illness but does not require exclusion from the early care environment, consider special dining arrangements to prevent the spread of illness. This might include having the teacher serve meal components.
- Adults showing signs of illness should not serve children.
- If the center experiences a communicable disease outbreak, including gastro intestinal illness, family style dining should be temporarily suspended.

## MORE INFORMATION

### Child Care Health Consultants

kentuckycchc.org  
877-281-5277

### Kentucky Food Safety Branch

chfs.ky.gov/dph/info/phps/food.htm  
502-564-7181

### Child and Adult Care Food Program

education.ky.gov  
502-564-5625

### Local Health Departments

chfs.ky.gov/dph

## RESOURCES

**Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards for ECEs**

**Let's Move Child Care: Technical Assistance Manual**

**Benchmarks for Nutrition Programs in Child Care Settings**

*Journal of the American Dietetic Association*

**Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC)**

*Preventing Chronic Disease*

**Family Style Meals in Child Care Handout**

*Missouri Dept. of Health and Senior Services*



**Kentucky Public Health**

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