

National ECELC Newsletter

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The National ECELC

Welcome to the National Early Care and Education Collaboratives Project (ECELC) Newsletter! We hope this newsletter is helpful as we offer supplemental information to help you prepare for the Learning Sessions and provide technical assistance to early care and education (ECE) providers. Topics within each newsletter will emphasize areas outlined in the *Lets Move! Child Care* goals including healthy eating, physical activity, screen time, and breastfeeding support. We hope you enjoy it!

-The National ECELC Team

Visit the *Let's Move! Child Care* website:

www.healthykidshealthyfuture.org

Supporting Parents to Provide Healthy Lunches

Encouraging parents to improve habits currently practiced at home may be challenging. Small changes, like swapping foods to include healthier options at mealtime, can make a big difference. A packed lunch can make a valuable contribution to a child's diet and is important to include a variety of foods so that children get all the nutrients they need. Factors such as nutritional awareness, budget and time play a role in what food choices are used to pack lunches. Quick meals have become a trend for busy parents and families.¹

Here are some suggested tips to promote healthy habits that support parents bringing packed lunches:

- Share with the parents the benefits of healthy eating on their child's development;
- Revise program policies to discourage sweets and other unhealthy snacks from being brought from home;
- Recommend that parents provide at least one fruit and vegetable in their lunch;
- Encourage small changes in the lunch (i.e. wheat bread over white, fresh fruit, fewer calorie foods);
- Distribute monthly suggested favorite foods or sample menus;
- Encourage parents to be creative;
- Send home activities to help promote healthy foods that can be packed;
- Discuss with parents the opportunity to take children grocery shopping with them and help pick out healthy foods; and
- Have parent-child cooking classes to introduce them to new foods they can prepare for their children and pack.

Materials for Parents

Providing Healthy Lunches

As our ECE programs continue to improve their menus to provide healthier food options, it can be difficult to monitor those lunches that are being brought in from home. To support parents, ECE providers can use the many resources provided to them through the National ECELC project. Below is a list of resources that participants receive in LS 2 & LS 3:

- **Nemours' Best Practices for Healthy Eating Guide** - "Family Tip Sheets" on pages 49-72
- **Sesame Street Healthy Habits for Life Toolkit** - "Family Newsletter" on pages 67 & 77
- **CACFP Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children Handbook** - "Building a Healthy Plate" tip sheets on pages 5-53
- **Let's Move! Child Care Website** (www.healthykidshealthyfuture.org) - Green tab, "Make Nutrition Fun"

Questions?

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Family-Style Dining for "Lunch Box Kids"

Are your early care and education (ECE) providers having a difficult time promoting family-style dining when children are bringing lunches from home? There are many ways to promote family-style dining and still include parents and those "lunch box kids". Share the tips below with your ECE providers to support parents in providing healthy meals at lunch, but also to help their children enhance gross and fine motor skills and social-emotional skills by participating in family-style dining.

ECE providers can encourage parents to bring in whole produce to be cut up by program staff and passed around family-style at mealtime. The program staff or parents can take turns bringing in a whole fruit or vegetable and the program staff can cut it up right before mealtime. The cut up fruit or vegetable can be placed in a child size bowl with age appropriate serving utensils. Therefore, children can still practice family-style dining by passing the bowl around while serving themselves at least one component of the meal. If providing whole fruits and vegetables is not feasible, then encourage children to pour and drink the beverage that is served at mealtime (preferably milk or water) and request that parents do not pack a beverage. Remember, food must be cut up at the program, not beforehand, due to food safety regulations. Always follow local food safety requirements and standards.

Classroom celebrations are another opportunity to practice family-style dining with healthy treats. ECE providers can serve the snacks on small platters to be passed around the table, while encouraging the children to discuss the taste, texture, color, and shape of the food. Lastly, always include "lunch box kids" in setting the table, practicing passing the bowls and pitchers around the table, engaging them in conversation around the healthy items in their lunches, and involving all children in clean up.

¹ Public Health Agency (2013, September 5). PHA encourages parents to pack a healthy lunch for kids. Retrieved June 24, 2014, from Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement: www.publichealth.hscni.net/news.

