

# FAMILY STYLE MEALS

**Having children sit together and serve themselves often leads to choosier eaters being more likely to accept and try new foods!**

Child care providers have an opportunity to influence children's eating behaviors by not only the types of foods they offer but also how they offer it. By serving family style meals a provider can create a supportive, encouraging, and healthy mealtime environment that exposes children to healthy foods and helps them learn to enjoy them.

## What are Family Style Meals?

In this style of dining, food is placed on the table in serving bowls and children are encouraged to serve themselves (some children may need help from an adult). Caregivers sit at the table and eat with the children to help model proper mealtime manners.

## Why does this matter?

Family style meals help children develop a number of skills and abilities including:

- Motor skills
- Language
- Self-esteem
- Social skills
- Table manners
- Independence



## Tips for successful Family Style Meals:

- Use child-sized everything if you can – table, chairs, serving bowls and spoons, plates, and utensils.
- Let children help from start to finish. This includes preparing the food, setting the table, serving themselves and clean-up.
- Encourage (but never force) children to take a little of everything. Help them understand what an appropriate serving size is (e.g., 1 scoop, 2 scoops, etc.).
- Talk about the taste, smell, look, and feel of food. Family style meals are a great time to teach new vocabulary and help children learn to appreciate and savor their food.
- It's okay to start small! Maybe start serving food this way at a snack, or begin with one component like letting children set the table.