

Community Action Team
CHILD & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
 Educational Guidance for Family Style Meal Service

According to "Big Red" the CACFP (*Child & Adult Care Food Program*) Policy and Procedure Manual, "A supervising adult must be seated at each table for the duration of the meal (p. 144)." Duration is defined by Merriam Webster as: (1) continuance in time and (2) the time in which something exists or lasts.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide program standards for best practice and suggest ways center managers can support teachers with the intent of CACFP while maximizing development, learning, and socialization during meal time.

Center Manager will lead and work with staff to implement the following standards for best practice:

- Develop a system to utilize parents to supervise a table for each meal and create a plan for training and specific recognition of supervising adult volunteers. Use this activity as a parent engagement opportunity. Ask parents to participate and schedule parents on a regular rotation. It may take multiple invite requests before a parent says yes, so continue to ask.
- Work with DHS to determine and verify the volunteer time to count toward the parent's employment training plan when applicable.
- Review staffing patterns center-wide and determine what changes can be made to staff schedules and routines that strategically allows for support staff to cover a designated table during meals.
- Monitor meal production planning to ensure adequate amounts of food items are placed on the table or are readily available to provide at least minimum portions for each participant and supervising adult to be served.
- Ensure teaching teams plan the mealtime routine and use visuals so that children can be successful with independence, cooperation, and self-regulation before, during and after meals.
- Ensure teaching teams implement transitions in an efficient manner that limits the amount of idle time children spend before, during and after meals.
- Ensure teachers plan in advance, the environment and activities to support the children's learning and engagement before, during and after meals.

Suggestions – Ideas that may support the above standards for best practice:

- Embed learning songs, chants, rhymes, Mighty Minutes, Brain Builders, etc. into the hygiene transition for children who are waiting before and after meals.
- Identify, schedule and ensure there is at least one supervising adult for each meal table plus an extra adult that is readily available to step in and support a table or child if/when needed.

- When possible, staff each table to allow for one adult to supervise 5-7 children.
- Rethink meal time routines to reduce the time it takes for children to begin eating once they arrive at the table.
- When space allows, plan the classroom or meal room environment so that children may independently transition to something productive and engaging once they have finished eating while the supervising adult remains at the table with children continuing to eat. Provide consistent visuals or verbal directions that allow children to self-monitor time.
- Plan the after meal environment with learning materials that are easy for children to access and put away when finished. Or, teachers can plan and bring a book for each table to read to the children when they are finished eating.
- When space does not allow for transitioning children to an area where they can be independently engaged, plan for and bring learning materials in a pocket, basket, tray or tub that children can select and work on at their table when finished.
- Facilitate and sustain conversations – think HELLO – H=have conversations, E=Extend, L=Listen and ask questions, L=Listen and expand, and O=offer new words.
- Create in advance conversation starter statements for the topic of study, the current interest of the children, a favorite story, Picturing America posters, or current events.
- Intentionally plan to use new vocabulary words of the day/week in meal time conversation. Consider posting vocabulary words in the meal area.
- Plan intentional after-the-meal activities that support the individual goals of children.
- Provide supervising adults with any plans and materials they will need to engage children.
- Consider CLASS domain and dimension opportunities during meal time.
- When possible, seat children strategically so children who dine quickly are not at the same table with children who take the full meal time allotment to finish.

Reminder – have children wash their hands after the meal.