

Family Style Eating

The following procedures are to be implemented in all Head Start classrooms at all mealtimes with the children. Please note: anyone present in the classroom during mealtime is expected to sit at the tables with the children and participate in mealtime. Please have any visitors read this mealtime procedure.

Before the Meal:

- attractive arrangement
- child size furniture
- plates, cups utensils, pitchers (an appropriate size for child success)
- tables apart to permit walking
- conversation and socializing
- 6-7 children with one adult at each table
- children help to set up their own space randomly (it should be the child's choice) or children take turns setting the tables for others
- all place settings for each meal are set with a fork, spoon, and a knife to allow for choice of utensil, success in eating independently, and practice using all kinds of utensils
- all children and adults wash their hands prior to sitting at the table
- there is minimal waiting time for children at the meal table

During the Meal:

- at least one adult sits with children during meals to provide a good role model and encourage conversation
- children serve themselves from the serving dishes with serving utensils which allow for maximum success for independence, then pass the serving dish to the child next to them
- children are encouraged to feed themselves
- adults model proper use of utensils and encourage proper use but children are not forced to use a specific utensil but rather to use problem solving to be successful
- children are not rushed to finish eating and may eat at their own pace
- food/liquid spills are responded to lightly while encouraging and assisting the child to clean up
- conversations are encouraged
- children are encouraged to taste, but may refuse a food
- food is never used as a reward or denied as a punishment
- good hygiene and safety practices and manners are modeled by adults at all times

After the Meal:

- continue a relaxed atmosphere
- children may leave the table when they are finished eating
- before resuming play the child is guided to clean off their own space and put used dishes in a designated place.
- to avoid throwing away utensils, a container should be placed on the table for children to place used utensils before they leave the table
- mealtime table space is washed off by the child
- after clean up children are encouraged to engage in a quiet, self directed activity
- a few children will help to sweep under the table and wipe off chairs