

**How Mealtimes Can Set the Stage for Better Learning,  
Behavior and Health in Children**

**Handouts for  
Early Childhood Educators  
and  
Childcare Providers**



Developed by the Montana Team Nutrition Program, (406) 994-5641  
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## ELLYN SATTER'S DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITY IN FEEDING

Parents provide *structure, support and opportunities*. Children choose *how much* and *whether* to eat from what the parents provide.

### **The Division of Responsibility for Infants:**

- The parent is responsible for *what*
- The child is responsible for *how much* (and everything else)

The parent helps the infant to be calm and organized and feeds smoothly, paying attention to information coming from the baby about timing, tempo, frequency and amounts.

### **The Division of Responsibility for Toddlers through Adolescents**

- The parent is responsible for *what, when, where*
- The child is responsible for *how much* and *whether*

### **Parents' Feeding Jobs:**

- Choose and prepare the food
- Provide regular meals and snacks
- Make eating times pleasant
- Show children what they have to learn about food and mealtime behavior
- Not let children graze for food or beverages between meal and snack times
- Let children grow up to get bodies that are right for them

Fundamental to parents' jobs is trusting children to decide *how much* and *whether* to eat. If parents do their jobs with *feeding*, children will do their jobs with *eating*:

### **Children's Eating Jobs:**

- Children will eat
- They will eat the amount they need
- They will learn to eat the food their parents eat
- They will grow predictably
- They will learn to behave well at the table



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## DEVELOPMENTAL PRINCIPLES GUIDING FEEDING PRACTICES

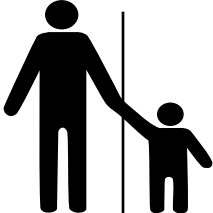
*At all ages, developmentally appropriate feeding depends on a division of responsibility. The child must be allowed and encouraged to determine what and how much to eat from what the parent provides.*

Child's age, developmental tasks	Parents' jobs in optimum feeding
<p><b>Newborn 0-3 months</b>  <b>Homeostasis</b>                      Remain calm and alert                      Begin to be interested                      Filter stimuli                      Regulate sleep states                      Begin to explore: Sight, touch, taste, smell</p>	<p><b>Core tasks: Observe and understand the infant. Respond to infant cues.</b>                      Understand and respect sleep rhythms                      Learn to read and respond to baby's cues                      Time care and feeding for quiet alert state                      Understand baby's own temperament                      Be willing and able to feed on demand</p>
<p><b>Infant 2-6 months Attachment</b>                      Learn to love                      Coordinate reflexes                      Move and communicate deliberately</p>	<p><b>Core task: Develop and maintain emotional give and take.</b>                      Help baby be calm and alert during feeding                      Feed baby when she wants to eat                      Talk and smile; talk and smile back                      Understand baby's signs and do what baby wants</p>
<p><b>Older baby 5-9 months</b>  <b>Attachment/separation individuation</b>                      Consolidating attachment                      Beginning to experience self as separate                      Begins taking an interest in what lies beyond the parent</p>	<p><b>Core task: Understand and support the child's interest in things</b>                      Understand baby's development: eating skills and body control                      Start solids based on what baby can <i>do</i>, not how old she is                      Feed the way baby wants to eat: fast or slow, little or much, brave or cautious                      Give baby many chances to like new food                      Have family meals the child is working toward joining</p>
<p><b>Almost-toddler 7-15 months</b>  <b>Separation individuation</b>                      Begins to experience self as separate                      Cares deeply about doing it him- or herself</p>	<p><b>Core task: Recognize and support the child's need to do it herself.</b>                      Include the child at family meals                      Choose "safe" food to pick up, chew and swallow                      Give many chances to experiment with new food and learn to like it                      Time snacks so child can be hungry but not too hungry at mealtime                      Give attention but not <i>all</i> the attention</p>
<p><b>Toddler 11-36 months</b>  <b>Separation individuation</b>                      Develops perception of self as "separate"                      Grapples with balancing connection &amp; autonomy                      Develops concept of control                      Somatopsychological differentiation (distinguishing feelings from sensations)                      Organizes behavior into sequences</p>	<p><b>Core task: Teach child he or she is part of the family</b>                      Have family meals; scheduled snacks                      Not let the child graze                      Eat with the child                      Teach the child to behave at mealtimes                      Not short order cook                      Let the child experiment, eat much or little</p>
<p><b>Preschooler 3-5 years</b>  <b>Initiative</b>                      Learning and doing                      Working toward mastery                      Symbolic thought: "figures out"                      Imitates and tries to please</p>	<p><b>Core task: Provide both structure and trust</b>                      Make choices about parenting                      Provide mastery opportunities                      Maintain structure of meals and snacks                      Don't force, reward or shame                      Parents eat with child; don't just feed                      Make mealtimes pleasant</p>

# FEEDING POLICY

Our child care facility adheres to Ellyn Satter's division of responsibility in feeding:  
**Feeding demands a division of responsibility—**

Adults are responsible for *what, when, and where*



Children are responsible for *how much and whether*

We provide nutritious, regularly scheduled meals and snacks

*Meals and snacks are an important part of our program day.*

- We take time to help children relax and prepare to eat.
- We sit down to eat with children and have good times.
- We help children learn to behave well at meal and snack times.

*We follow federal and state guidelines to plan meals and snacks.*

- We keep in mind the special food needs of small children.
- We offer familiar and popular foods along with unfamiliar foods.
- We let children eat what they like and also try out new foods.

*We follow guidelines on wellness to cook food moderate, not low, in fat.*

- We use meat, poultry, and fish as well as cooked dried beans.
- We use lean red meats but do not restrict red meat.
- We serve whole or 2% milk.
- We let children help themselves to salad dressings, butter and/or margarine.

We trust children to manage their own eating

*Children will eat, they will eat what they need, and they will learn to eat the new foods that we offer.*

- We let children pick and choose from the food we make available.
- We let children eat as little or as much of the food as they want.

*Some days children eat a lot, other days, not so much. But they know how much they need.*

- We do not limit the amounts children eat.
- We do not force children to eat certain foods or certain amounts of food.

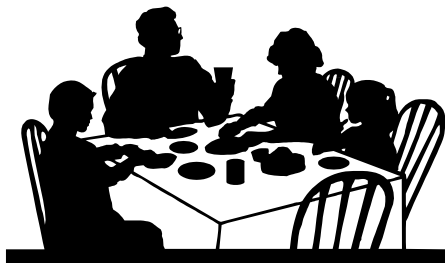
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Also see Ellyn Satter's books, *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family*, *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*, and *Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming*.

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# Mealtime Philosophy

During mealtimes at (insert name of childcare center), adults and children eat together and share the same food, milk, juice and water. The adults seated at each table model the mealtime philosophy and appropriate mealtime behavior.

Children serve themselves and pour their own milk, juice or water. They are invited to put at least a small portion of every food onto their plates. They are encouraged, but never forced, to taste everything.

Children are allowed to eat at their own pace. Dessert is served as part of the meal. Children may eat dessert without finishing their other food.

We encourage pleasant discussions about food, nutrition, and other topics. After the meal, children put away their dishes, utensils and paper products.

ADULTS are the most important role models for children at mealtimes. Please remember that children will do as they see.

We support a philosophy that respects a *division of responsibility between adults and children* at mealtime. Simply put,

- Adults decide the *what, when, and where* of feeding
- Children decide *whether they will choose to eat the foods offered and how much to eat*

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This information was adapted from material from Ellyn Satter, MS, RD, LCSW, BSD, and Dayle Hayes, MS, RD for Head Start, Inc. in Billings, Montana.



## **10 Steps that Early Childhood Educators can take to create and support Healthy Feeding Relationships at Mealtime**

1. Support the basic principles of the Division of Responsibility in Feeding and recognize its importance in developing a positive Feeding Relationship between adults and children.
2. Develop a simple and clear Mealtime Policy which supports the Division of Responsibility in Feeding.
3. Train staff on the Mealtime Policy and share this information with parents and their children.
4. Make your mealtime table a pleasant place to be.
5. Use Family Style meals to raise confident and competent eaters.
6. Be a Healthy Role Model!
7. Provide meals and sit-down snacks at regularly scheduled times.
8. Provide a variety of foods
  - a. Healthy meal planning (variety, colorful, fresh, appealing); to meet the minimum CACFP meal pattern if applicable; enough food is prepared
  - b. Familiar with unfamiliar foods
  - c. Don't give up, keep offering for 6-8 weeks
9. Respect a child's feelings of fullness and/or feelings of hunger.
10. Enjoy food and active play every day!



# Family Style Dining in Child Care

In family style dining, all food is placed in serving bowls on the table and children are encouraged to serve themselves or serve themselves with help from an adult.

The adult child care givers sit at the table with the children. Children and child care givers practice good manners in a pleasant mealtime setting.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) supports family style dining in the child care setting.

## What are the Benefits of Family Style Dining for the Children?

Children can learn and practice many social skills, such as taking turns, passing food to others, saying please and thank you, and helping to set the table.

Children can serve themselves with carefully chosen serving dishes. Bowls with wide lips are most easily handled by young children. Plastic serving bowls are light-weight and don't conduct heat.



Children often want to try new foods when they see the other children and adults eating them.

Children enjoy eating with adults and practicing good table manners.

## What are the Benefits of Family Style Dining for the Child Care Provider?

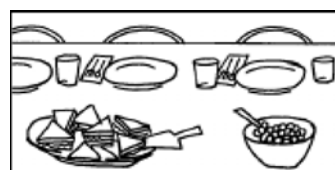
Child care givers benefit by being able to sit and eat with the children. Because all of the food for the meal is placed on the table at the beginning of the meal, the

child care giver does not have to act as server, unless more food is needed for second servings.

Children and care givers can enjoy quiet conversation and a relaxed meal together. Care givers can use the opportunity to talk with the children about nutrition and about the foods that they are enjoying together.

## Points to Remember

- Be prepared! Talk with the children about what will happen. You may wish to have a "meal" set up in the play area so that children can practice.
- Provide child-size plates, cups, utensils, and serving bowls that children can use comfortably.
- Have all foods on the table at the beginning of the meal. Have enough food available to meet meal pattern requirements and to allow for seconds. Some food may spill as children learn to serve themselves. Allow for this.
- Think about each child's ability to serve himself. For some children, you may need to start with only one or two foods as self-serve, then serve them the other foods that are required in the meal pattern.
- Some children may need more help than others. Seat these children near an adult.
- Expect spills. Children are learning and accidents will happen. Wipe up spills without a fuss.

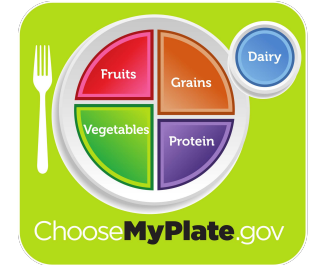


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# Phrases that *HELP* and *HINDER*

As the caregiver, you play the biggest role in your child's eating behavior. What you say has an impact on developing healthy eating habits. Negative phrases can easily be changed into positive, helpful ones!



## Phrases that *HINDER*

### INSTEAD OF ...

*Eat that for me.*  
*If you do not eat one more bite, I will be mad.*

Phrases like these teach your child to eat for your approval and love. This can lead your child to have unhealthy behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs about food and about themselves.

### INSTEAD OF ...

*You're such a big girl; you finished all your peas.*  
*Jenny, look at your sister. She ate all of her bananas.*  
*Your have to take one more bite before you leave the table.*

Phrases like these teach your child to ignore fullness. It is better for kids to stop eating when full or satisfied than when all of the food has been eaten.

### INSTEAD OF ...

*See, that didn't taste so bad, did it?*

This implies to your child that he or she was wrong to refuse the food. This can lead to unhealthy attitudes about food or self.

### INSTEAD OF ...

*No dessert until you eat your vegetables.*  
*Stop crying and I will give you a cookie.*

Offering some foods, like dessert, in reward for finishing others, like vegetables, makes some foods seem better than others. Getting a food treat when upset teaches your child to eat to feel better. This can lead to overeating.

## Phrases that *HELP*

### TRY ...

*This is kiwi fruit; it's sweet like a strawberry.*  
*These radishes are very crunchy!*

Phrases like these help to point out the sensory qualities of food. They encourage your child to try new foods.

### TRY ...

*Is your stomach telling you that you're full?*  
*Is your stomach still making its hungry growling noise?*  
*Has your tummy had enough?*

Phrases like these help your child to recognize when he or she is full. This can prevent overeating.

### TRY ...

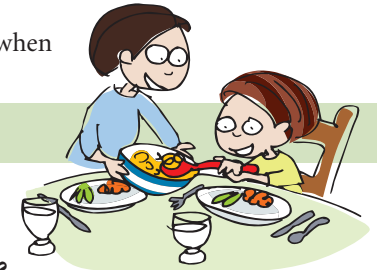
*Do you like that?*  
*Which one is your favorite?*  
*Everybody likes different foods, don't they?*

Phrases like these make your child feel like he or she is making the choices. It also shifts the focus toward the taste of food rather than who was right.

### TRY ...

*We can try these vegetables again another time. Next time would you like to try them raw instead of cooked?*  
*I am sorry you are sad. Come here and let me give you a big hug.*

Reward your child with attention and kind words. Comfort him or her with hugs and talks. Show love by spending time and having fun together.





## Practicing Phrases that Help Worksheet

Use this worksheet to practice saying key phrases to support children in becoming competent eaters. Use some of the phrases provided on the *Phrases that Help and Hinder* handout from MyPlate for Preschoolers and include some of your own personal phrases.

Step 1. Find a partner.

Step 2. Taking turns, read the phrases out loud. Talk about why some phrases help and why some phrases hinder, based on the Division of Responsibility in Feeding. Practice saying the phrases that help out loud to your partner. Which phrases do you like? Share some of the phrases that you use regularly at mealtimes in your child care home or center.

Step 3.

Working together, consider these feeding scenarios and role-play a feeding situation that supports positive feeding relations and the division of responsibility in feeding.

### **Scenario 1. Child is suspicious of trying a new food and vocalizes his/her strong disapproval at the table.**

This is an example of a caregiver saying phrases that hinder:

Child says: ***What is that?*** I don't like it. I'm not eating it!

Care giver says: It is tuna noodle casserole and ***that*** is what we are having for lunch.

Child says: It looks yucky. Do I have to eat it?

Care giver says: It is good food. You need to try one bite to see if you like it.

Re-do this scenario with the caregiver saying phrases that help:

Child says: ***What is that?*** I don't like it. I'm not eating it!

Care giver says: (Example: It is tuna noodle casserole. It has noodles and cheese in it.)

Identify 2 phrases that help:

1.

2.

Child says: It looks yucky. Do I have to eat it?

Care giver says: (Example: Caregiver can ignore the "It looks yucky comment" or say "We all like different foods. Let's keep our opinions about "yucky" foods to ourselves, so the others can try it if they want to. No, you don't have to eat it. You can choose from the other things that are offered for lunch today.")

Identify 2 phrases that help:

1.

2.

## Taking a Closer Look at the “No, Thank-You Bite” A Discussion Sheet

A “No Thank-You Bite” is a common name for a rule that says children must try at least one bite of all the foods at the table. Some people have also called this a “Thank the Cook Bite”.

1. Describe your childcare center or home’s current policy on the “no, thank-you bite” rule. Do you use it? Do you not use it?
2. What were your thoughts or beliefs about the “no thank you bite” rule before this presentation?
3. What are your thoughts or beliefs about the “no thank you bite” rule after this presentation?
4. Does the use of the “no, thank you bite” rule support or interfere with the Division of Responsibility in Feeding? Why?
5. Comments for discussion:

This worksheet was adapted from Feeding Young Children in Group Settings, Professors Fletcher and Branen, University of Idaho, College of Agriculture.

