



## Family Style Meals

Serving Summer Meals family style helps teach children healthy eating habits! It creates a healthful eating environment that is responsive to children's hunger and fullness cues. Children are encouraged to try new foods by seeing other children and adults eating them.

Go to [Resources](#).

### What Are the Benefits?

Serving meals family style allows children and Program adults to eat together, creates a relaxing eating environment, and promotes healthy eating habits and attitudes toward food:

- Children learn and practice social and motor skills such as taking turns, sharing, and passing, pouring and scooping foods;
- Children may choose to take smaller portions of food and know they can take seconds if they want;
- Supervising adults act as good role models for children by sitting at the same table and eating the same meal as the children; and
- Children and adults can enjoy pleasant conversation with each other in a family-like environment.

### How Does It Work?

In a family style meal service, all the foods needed to meet the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) meal pattern requirements are placed in serving plates or bowls on a table for children to serve themselves. It offers sponsors flexibility in the initial serving sizes because replenishment is immediately available at each table. Sponsors must use this flexibility while following these practices:

- A sufficient amount of food must be placed on each table to provide the required portions of each of the food components, as outlined in the SFSP meal patterns (7 CFR 225.16), for all children at the table and any Program adults supervising the meal service eating with the children.



10/01/20

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- Children are allowed the choice in selecting foods and the size of the initial serving. Children should initially be offered the full required portion of each food component.
- When a child does not initially take the full required portion of a food component, it is the supervising adult's responsibility to actively encourage the child to accept the full required portion of each food component. For example, if a child initially refuses a food component, or initially does not take the full required portion of a food component, an adult should offer the food component to the child again.

### **Is Your Site Eligible?**

- A family style meal service is a good option for camps and closed enrolled summer meal sites. However, this option is not allowed at open and open restricted SFSP or Seamless Summer Option sites.
- If family style meal service is not practical or possible for some camp or closed enrolled sites, it may be beneficial to offer a component or components in a family style manner, particularly when smaller children are being served or when a new food item is being introduced.

### **Tips for Success!**

- Have all the food placed on the table at the beginning of the meal.
- Think about children's ability to serve themselves. Some children may need more help than others, especially younger children. Seat those children near a supervising adult.
- Start by letting children serve themselves something easy such as a piece of bread, then gradually increase the number and variety of foods they serve themselves.
- Expect spills and show children how to handle them.
- Encourage children to try new foods and praise them when they do.



- Make positive statements when discussing the food and meal and encourage children to do the same. Avoid using negative or pressuring statements.
- Provide adequate time for all children to finish eating.
- Demonstrate good table manners and healthy eating.
- Start a conversation with the children at the table.

## Remember Food Safety!

There are a few food safety concerns sponsors should be aware of when serving meals family style. Sponsors must know and follow their State or local health requirements for serving meals family style to prevent any possible food safety issues. It is important to:

- Keep food at the proper temperatures;
- Use appropriate and clean containers and utensils to serve the meal; and
- Make sure all children and supervising adults wash their hands.

## Resources

### USDA

- *Meal Service Requirements in the Summer Meal Programs, with Questions and Answers – Revised*  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/meal-service-requirements-summer-meal-programs-questions-and-answers-%E2%80%93-revised>
- *Nutrition Guide*  
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/2018-nutrition-guide>
- *Summer Food, Summer Moves*  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/summer-food-summer-moves>





### **Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN)**

*Tips for Serving Meals Family Style*

<https://theicn.org/resources/386/2017-mealtime-memos/106278/april-2017-tips-for-serving-meals-family-style.pdf>

### **National CACFP Sponsors Association**

*Serving Family Style Dining Tips*

[https://www.cacfp.org/files/4415/3512/5506/Family\\_Style\\_Dining\\_Tips.pdf](https://www.cacfp.org/files/4415/3512/5506/Family_Style_Dining_Tips.pdf)

## **For Additional Information**

Review these ideas and adopt the strategies that seem reasonable to you and achievable for your Program. The Summer Meals Toolkit has even more creative ideas and resources at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>

Do you have more questions? Sponsors and the general public should contact their State agency for answers. State agencies should contact their Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Regional Office.

List of FNS Regional Offices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>

List of State Agencies: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-contacts>

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