

# FAMILY-STYLE DINING DURING MEAL TIMES

INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION SHEET



Family-style dining is a mealtime approach that child care programs can implement to help support children with healthy eating and positive social-emotional development.

## FAMILY STYLE DINING INVOLVES:

Placing all food for the meal on the table and sitting around.



Children and adults setting the table, sitting, and cleaning up together when dining.



Encouraging children to serve themselves independently with adult assistance as needed.



Educators sitting and eating alongside children, modeling table manners and positive interactions.



Educators guiding and supporting children to try new foods without pressure.



## Family-Style Dining: A Daily Opportunity to Nurture the Four Foundations of Learning.

### BELONGING

Children feel included and valued when everyone shares the same meal space and routine.

Educators foster a classroom culture of inclusion and connection.

Families experience a sense of partnership when their child's routines and identities are respected and reflected.



### ENGAGEMENT

Children take on active roles in serving food and choosing portions, which boosts independence and participation.

Educators observe emerging skills and interests in real time.

Families can be invited to share cultural food practices or routines, creating meaningful connections.



## EXPRESSION

Children engage in conversation, practice language, and express ideas, needs, and preferences.

Educators model respectful dialogue and build stronger relationships by listening deeply.

Families gain insight when educators share stories from mealtimes, strengthening home-school connections.



Food and mealtime rituals can be a window into diverse cultures and family experiences.



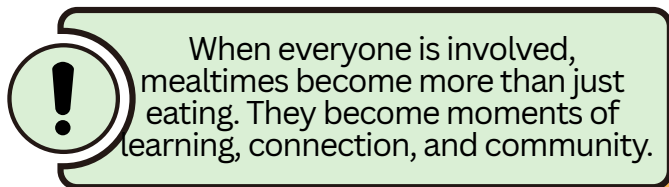
## WELLBEING

Children develop self-help skills and a sense of autonomy in a calm, predictable routine.

Educators co-regulate with children, support healthy eating, and promote self-care.

Families feel reassured when children enjoy mealtimes and routines that reflect care and consistency.





## GETTING STARTED

**Start Small:** Begin with one meal or snack a day to introduce the routine gradually.

**Use Child-Friendly Dishes:** Provide small pitchers, tongs, and serving bowls that are easy for children's skill levels.

**Set Clear Expectations:** Teach and model how to pass food, use utensils, and take turns.

**Create a Welcoming Setup:** Arrange seating so everyone can see and interact with each other.



[wf-eph-family-style-meal-child-care.pdf](#)



[Family-Style Dining in Child Care Settings | Virtual Lab School](#)



Resource binder Rainbow Food Explorers #12671



[connect@thrc.ca](mailto:connect@thrc.ca)



905-875-4600 ext. 101