

Making Mealtimes Learning Times

Breakfast, lunch and snack can be important learning times during the daily schedule. Sitting and talking with children allows them the opportunity to describe events and share feelings and information. Listening skills are also enhanced through conversational “give and take”. In addition to language development, meals offer adults the opportunity to model correct table behavior and to reinforce social skills in the children.

Some ideas to use during meals:

- ◇ Discuss the food that is being served. How does it taste? Is it crunchy or soft? The shape, color, portion sizes, similarities and differences in the food items are all topics for conversation.
- ◇ Discuss family life happenings. Children enjoy recounting experiences with their families.
- ◇ Discuss the day’s events at school. As children talk, ask open-ended questions to encourage the children to extend their conversations. Use comments such as “Tell me more about...” or “Why do you think that happened?”.
- ◇ Silly Stories—Begin a story with a “what if” question, such as “What if the hamster could talk?” or “What if the teacher forgot to come to school?”.
- ◇ Tell children you are going to practice eating in an elegant restaurant. Use a cloth and candles on the tables. Turn out the lights, play soft music on the record player or tape recorder and enjoy “fine dining”.
- ◇ Darken the room while eating and pretend to be having a cookout. Tell the children they must use soft voices so they won’t scare away the animals. Discuss the animals that they might see in the woods.
- ◇ Write each child’s name on a large sheet of construction paper to serve as a placemat. Laminate or cover with contact paper. Allow children to use crayons to practice writing their names while they are waiting to be served.
- ◇ When speaking to children during meals, adults can focus on a particular category of words such as:
 - Nouns: Names of the food and food groups, dishes, utensils, furniture, table setting, etc.
 - Actions: Eat, drink, taste, chew, swallow, cut and pour.
 - Opposites: Hot/cold, sweet/sour, more/less, empty/full, all/none/ half/whole, raw/cooked, etc.
 - Adjectives: Color/shape words and other describing words such as: crunchy, mushy, fried, etc.
 - Location: On the table, next to the plate, in the bowl, under the table, etc.

Mealtimes should be relaxing, social, and a rewarding learning experience for children and adults.