



Making Mealtime Learning Time

Breakfast, lunch, and snack can be important learning times during the day. Sitting and talking with children allows them the opportunity to describe events, share feelings, and engage in conversations. Through the back-and-forth exchange of natural conversations, children's language skills are enhanced. In addition to language development, mealtimes provide an opportunity for adults to model correct table behavior and to reinforce social skills with the children.

Mealtimes should be relaxing, social, and rewarding learning experiences for children and adults. Consider implementing some of the ideas below during meals and snacks.

- **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 children to extend their conversations. Use comments such as, "Tell me more about it" or "Why do you think that happened?"
- **Mealtime Chatter Box:** Create a chatter box by using an empty tissue box or something similar. Decorate it with pictures of things for which the students have shown interest such as pictures of animals, cars, dinosaurs, etc. Cut an opening in the box in order to draw out the sample questions/statements. A few examples of questions/statements might include: "Who is your favorite community helper and why? If you could have any animal as a pet, what would it be and why? Tell me something you enjoy doing with your family." Consider searching the internet for mealtime conversation starters.
- **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?"
- **Placemat Practice:** 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/dry erase markers to practice writing their names while they are waiting to be served.
- **Engage in Conversations:** 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, pour, etc.

Opposites: Hot/cold, sweet/sour, more/less, empty/full, half/whole, raw/cooked, etc.

Adjectives: Color/shape words or other describing words such as crunchy, mushy, fried, etc.

