

# Family Style Dining in Childcare

This resource supports healthy and safe meal service in the Child Care setting and provides information about family style meals and children participating in food preparation

## What is family style dining?

Family style dining allows children and teachers to eat meals together in an environment that mimics a meal setting at home. This style of dining allows children to develop conversational skills while learning good table manners and eating habits. Family style dining should take into account the age-related abilities of children and tailor meal related tasks and menu items to accommodate this.

## How does this differ from traditional meal service in childcare?

Traditionally children would sit at a table and wait to be served by staff before eating. Family style dining incorporates some or all of the following elements:

- Food is placed on the table in bowls, baskets or on platters.
- Serving utensils are provided so that children may serve themselves (if able).
- Teachers and children are seated at the table together.
- Food and drink items are passed around the table from person to person.
- Children serve themselves (first serving) and staff serve second helpings (if applicable).

## Can children assist in food preparation?

Children may assist with food preparation such as baking, cutting, and slicing of fruits and vegetables, however:

- Children should be supervised during food handling.
- Ensure children wash hands before and after handling food.
- Do not allow ill children to handle food.
- Hair should be confined while working with food (e.g., tied back/hat/hairnet).
- Do not allow children to handle raw meats, raw eggs or unwashed produce.

## What does Public Health recommend?

When deciding which food and beverage items children may self-serve:

- Consider the age of children to ensure activities are age-appropriate.
- Provide utensils for serving of food (e.g., avoid direct hand contact with food).
- Teach children to handle utensils properly in order to avoid cross-contamination.
- Choose food items that will not pose a scalding risk to children (e.g., don't allow children to self-serve hot soup).
- Do not allow children to handle sharp utensils such as knives.
- Provide items in containers that children can easily handle (e.g., avoid heavy serving containers).
- Do not allow ill children or staff to handle utensils that will be handled by multiple people (staff should serve ill children).
- Staff or children should wash their hands after eating and prior to serving second helpings of food, if applicable.
- Keep food items covered until served.
- Discard leftover food items after 2 hours at room temperature (between 4°C - 60°C)

**Note - In an outbreak situation in the childcare setting, family style meals should not be offered. During an outbreak, staff should serve the children.**