

Benefits and Steps for Family Style Dining

Developmental benefits: The importance and positive effects of family style dining on a child's development.

Small and Large Muscle Development (motor development)

- Encourages children to serve themselves, which develops their eye-hand coordination.
- Encourages coordination of body movement to move chair, sit, and stand from chair.
- Helps children learn manipulation of utensils.

Language/Communication Development

- Promotes the rules of language (how to participate in interactions with language) through listening and participating in conversations.
- Exposes children to a variety of vocabulary.
- Allows participation in adult-child exchanges and the following of directions.
- Promotes peer-to-peer exchanges.

Cognitive Development

- Promotes use of tools and problem solving through manipulation of utensils.
- Promotes imitation, the ability to repeat and practice actions modeled by another.

Emotional Development

- Promotes a sense of competence. This is an indicator of infant and toddler emotional development. The child recognizes his or her ability to do things.
- Promotes self-awareness. This is an indicator of infant and toddler emotional development. The child recognizes himself or herself as a person with an identity, wants, needs, interests, likes, and dislikes.
- Encourages impulse control. This is part of a child's emotional development. Infants early on show signs of controlling some

impulses when supported by a care teacher. By 36 months, a toddler has internalized some rules so he or she doesn't always need as much support when trying to control his or her behavior.

Social Development

- Allows time for conversations about food, the events of the day, the events to come, and things that occurred at home—conversations that can happen by the time children are toddlers.
- Encourages interactions with adults and peers.
- Promotes social identity, an indicator of infant and toddler social development. The child develops increasing awareness of his or her relationship to others in the group.

What Family Style Dining Looks Like

- Eat in small groups at child-size table and chairs (adult may use adult-size chair). Provider sits with children.
- Provide a space for infants who are awake to be part of the meal. You could help feed the infants baby food or, if they are developmentally ready, you could offer small amounts of table food. For infants exclusively bottle-fed, you can hold and feed the infant at the table. Infants who are not hungry can sit in a caregiver's lap or in a safe seating space near or at the table so they can be part of the group.
- Realize the smaller the group, the less hectic the meal.
- Eat the same food that is served to children at same time children eat.
- Encourage self-serving, and assist if help is needed. If children are unable to feed themselves, then they are not developmentally ready to serve food to themselves.
- Set tables with serving platters, bowls, and milk pitchers all small enough to be managed by toddlers so they can serve themselves.
- Consider that children enjoy helping to set the table and serving themselves.
- Encourage social interactions and conversation. Talk about the food (temperature, taste, color, shape, size, quantity) and events of the

day. Do not make it a “quiz.” Ask open-ended questions, not “yes or no” questions.

- Follow the child’s lead on conversation topics.
- Provide extra help and allow for time for slow eaters.

