Family Style Dining:
How to Maximize Your Children's Meal Experience
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Meal Time Myths:

- Meal time must be serious.
- No Talking at the Table!
- Meal time is for eating, not for learning.
- It is too chaotic to teach during meal times.
- The kids will make a mess.
Let’s look at a few recipes that were submitted by children,
Their idea of how foods are cooked can be very entertaining.
Angel Cookies

- Mix 1 can of milk with 5 cups of sugar.
  Add 20 pounds of butter and 9 eggs.
  Mix it together and add a big bowl of flour.
  Cut lemons and squish the juice out.
  Don't cut your fingers or it hurts.
  Then get flour on the table and push it around.
  Find an Angel cookie cutter and stick it in the cookie stuff.
  Put the Angels on a pan and throw it in the oven.
  Kids can't do it so Mommy has to help them.
  Bake for about 2 seconds and wait until tomorrow.
  When Mommy says you can be putting frosting on it,
  then it's okay to help her.
  Don't eat too much frosting or you won't get any cookies.
  Sprinkle the Angels with sparkly dots and put pink sugar on them.
  They need a circle on their heads to make them into Angels.
Turkey Dinner

- Gut the dead Turkey bird that Daddy shot.
  Cut off its head and pull the feathers out.
  Make sure Mommy isn't in the room or she will barf.
  Then Daddy drowns it in water full of 10 pounds of salt.
  Take the Turkey out and dry it with a towel.
  Sprinkle 2 cups of the powder stuff that tastes funny.
  Open the legs and put a loaf of broken bread into the bum opening.
  Make some cooked carrots and stuff into the bread.
  Turn on the oven for the whole day and bake it until black.
  When it's done Mommy makes gravy and potatoes
Purpose:

- This training is designed to give you, the child care provider/educator, ideas and tools to help you incorporate math, science, literacy and social skills in your meal times.
Why?

➢ You might be asking yourself, why is this important?
➢ The EHS/HS day is filled with many activities and learning opportunities; circle time, story time, outside time, and yes, meal time!
➢ In a normal head start day, a child can spend 1:15 minutes in mealtime activities, this is a large chunk of a 4 or 6 hour day.
Teaching Colors:

- Foods come in an array of beautiful colors:
Colors and Language

> Use meal time to reinforce the name of the colors in English and Spanish by identifying the color of the foods when you speak.

- Instead of: “Please pass the peas to your neighbor”
- SAY:

  “Please pass the **GREEN/VERDE** peas to your neighbor”
When sitting at the table, engage in conversation with the children about what they are eating and have them compare and identify like colors:

Example: Teacher “Today we are eating carrots”, “what color are carrots?”

Teachers: “orange/anaranjado”

Teacher: “Yes, very good, what other foods are orange?”

Always leave the question open-ended to allow for thought process.
Math: Counting
Meal time is a great opportunity to reinforce counting skills

- Many foods are served by the piece: chicken nuggets, celery and carrot sticks,..
  - Teacher: “today we are eating 4 chicken nuggets, Lets count to 4 together”

Once the teacher has her 4 nuggets on her plate, make a game of it and have the children all count together as each child serves themselves.

This will reinforce the counting as each child serves themselves, and children will enjoy the “game” of it.
Math: Subtraction

- Counting the number of items, then counting backwards as you eat them, is a great way to work in subtraction and to get kids to “try” foods…
- You had 5 green beans. How many do you have if you eat two? Let’s try and see.
- Children will enjoy playing the game, and will be learning and trying new foods at the same time.
- How else might you use subtraction at your table?
State of Matter:

- What foods are liquid?
Science

- What are foods that are solid?
- “Today we are having: Toast, oatmeal, strawberries, and milk for breakfast.”
- Which of these foods are liquid?
- Which are solid?
- This helps children to identify and understand differences
- Give other examples you might use?
Science:

- When foods change states:
- Apples are a good example: they can be hard and crunchy, soft and mushy… even liquid.
- Applesauce comes from apples:
- What are some other examples you can think of?
Science

➢ Where does the food come from? Talk to the children about where the food they are eating came from?

➢ Talk about the different animals: What do we get from cows?
Relate The Foods

- Cow
- Burger
- Milk
- Eggs
- Chickens
Relate the Foods
SENSES: You can use meal time to teach children about the 5 senses

sight

touch

hearing

taste

smell
Sight:

➢ How does the food look: Is it big? Small? Brightly Colored?
Touch

Hearing:

- Most foods do not make sounds, but a few do? Rice Krispies? What sound do you hear?
Smell:

- What does the food smell like? Which foods have stronger smells? Which foods have NO smell?
Of course taste is a very important sense when talking about meal time: How does it taste: Salty, Sweet, Sour, Good, Bad.
Literacy at the Table

- While waiting at the table for the food to come into the room, you can be reading a book to the children. There are several children's books that have food themes;
  - “The Very Hungry Caterpillar”, “Little Bear Makes a Birthday Cake”, “Stone Soup” to name a few.

Of course, any children’s book would be appropriate while you wait.

A very good way to allow slow eaters to finish their food, is to read a book after most kids are done or finishing up.

What is your favorite book to read during meal time?
Extending Literacy to meal time

- Almost every early childhood classroom has at least one pocket chart…
- Using your pocket chart to graph meal items is a great way to increase the literacy.
- One of the easiest ways is to make a pocket chart card for each food… menus are on a cycle, so you will be using them over and over again.
Pocket charts

- Put the meal items in the chart at the top.
- Ask the kids to use their name card to put their name in the row that is their favorite meal item today… then count them… built in graphing, name recognition, literacy (pictures and words)
- Ask different questions like… which food is your least favorite, which food grows on a tree, which food is cooked… ?
Adapt for foods eaten at meal time: Have children choose their favorite food. Then count to see which food was most popular. What other activities could you do with this pocket chart?
Pocket charts continued

➤ Pocket charts can be used for many other things as well.
➤ They are great for identifying the steps to setting the table, washing your hands before lunch, or cleaning up after lunch.
➤ All reinforce literacy concepts.
Spelling and literacy: Adapt for foods you are serving today.
Pocket Charts: Food Groups
Have children identify in which food group a food belongs
Setting the table

➢ So many classrooms waste a really great opportunity to reinforce math skills, social skills… one to one correspondence, counting, working together…

➢ Think about the steps involved in setting the table:
Setting the table

First… count how many people will be eating. 7? Okay, so let’s count out 7 spoons, 7 knives, 7 forks… oh, and what do they go on? …. 7 napkins.
Setting the table

- Now that you have counted out the right number… how many does each person get?
- This addresses one to one correspondence as they place one spoon at each place setting.
- Kids love it when you act confused and try to put them all in one place… they love to correct the adults and explain how they should go!
Your Turn

➢ What are some fun activities that you do at the table with your children?

➢ Which of these activities are you most excited to try with your kids?
Questions
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