

# Setting the Stage for Eating Well

*The Nutrition Environment*



# Healthy Nutrition Environment

- Teaches children that mealtimes are enjoyable
- Helps form healthy lifelong eating habits
- Reduces risks of overweight and obesity

It's not just what we eat,  
but how we eat it

# What Is A Nutrition Environment?

- Interaction between adults and children while eating
- Style of meal service
- Physical surroundings
- Activities outside of meals
  - Celebrations
  - Fundraisers
  - Nutrition education





# Adult – Child Interaction

## Adults:

- Sit with children
- Eat same food as children
- Model good manners and behaviors
- Encourage, but don't make children taste foods
- Consume other foods and beverages only when away from children

# Adult – Child Interaction

## Adults:

- Avoid negative facial expressions, body language or verbal cues about the food
- Provide informal education about food
- Enjoy pleasant conversation with children
- Gently encourage, but don't force children to eat



# Adult – Child Interaction

| Parenting Style          | Child's Obesity Risk |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Strict disciplinarian    | Highest              |
| Permissive or neglectful | High                 |
| Flexible rule-setters    | Lowest               |

*Children need adults to set limits, but gradually allow them to be responsible for their eating*

# Division of responsibility in feeding children



## Adults are responsible for:

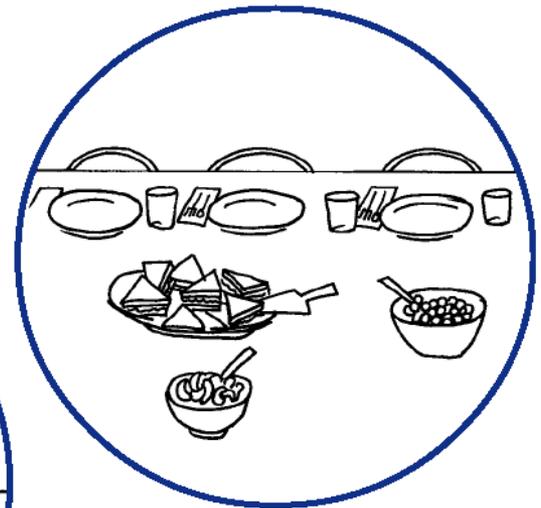
- Setting regular times for meals and snacks
- Planning and preparing healthy meals and snacks
- Assuring that the children come to the table at meal and snack times
- Creating a pleasant mealtime environment

## Children are responsible for:

- Deciding which of the healthy foods offered they want to eat
- Deciding how much food they want to eat



# Adults help children get to the table at mealtime



# Adults create a pleasant mealtime environment



from National Food Service Management Institute

# Children choose from healthy foods offered



# Children choose how much to eat



from National Food Service Management Institute

# What do you do if....

- Ethan has eaten all of his macaroni and cheese and asks for more. He hasn't touched anything else on his plate.
- Keshawn is a healthy, but slender little girl who often just pokes at her food.
- Anthony appears to be overweight. He quickly finishes the generous portions he serves himself, and then wants more.

# Family Style Meal Service

- Children serve selves from common platters of food with help from supervising adults
- Must have enough food at table to meet USDA meal pattern requirement
- Children **do not** have to take full sized portion



# Family Style Meal Service

## Benefits:

- Children learn social skills
- Children learn and practice serving skills
- Children learn to control the amount of food they want and need
- Children are more comfortable trying new foods
- Children learn responsibility
- Family meals create memories

# Family Style Meal Service

“But I only have so much patience.  
This could be a nightmare!”





# Family Style Meal Service

## Tips For Making It Work:

- Prepare before you implement
- Teach expected behavior
- Practice skills in classroom
- Start with just one food item
- Use child friendly serving bowls and utensils
- Have extra food and serving spoons handy

# Family Style Meal Service

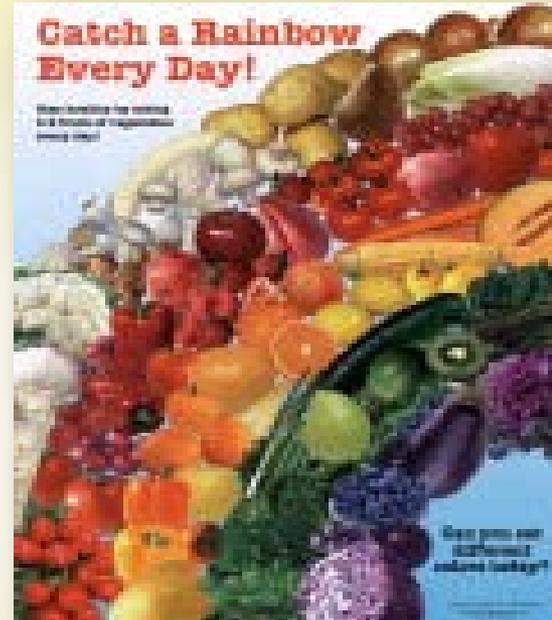
## Tips For Making It Work:

- Expect and be prepared for spills
- Teach children to help clean up spills
- Give each child a job
- Remember- it gets easier after children learn!



# Physical Surroundings

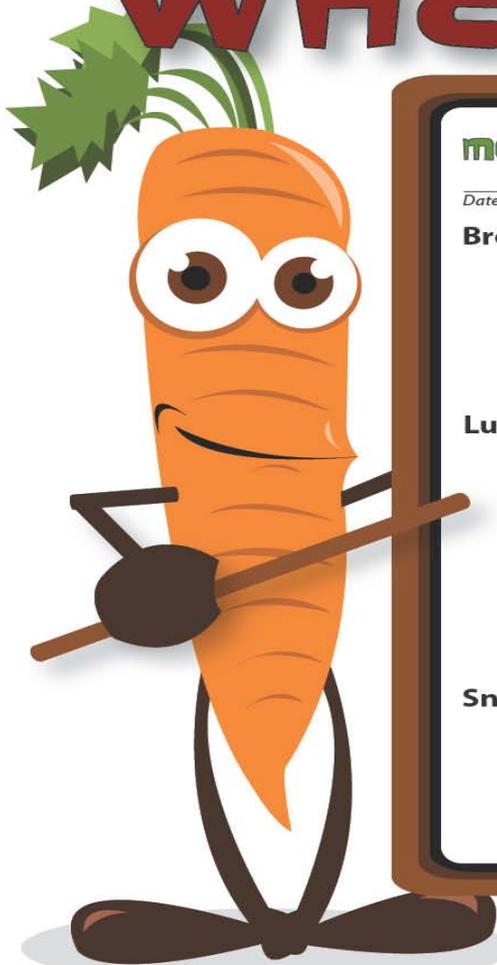
- Posters or pictures about healthy eating



- No TV during meal or snack time
- No vending machines around children

# Menu for Parents

## WHAT'S TO EAT THIS WEEK?



| MONDAY            | TUESDAY           | WEDNESDAY         | THURSDAY          | FRIDAY            |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Date</i> _____ |
| <b>Breakfast</b>  | <b>Breakfast</b>  | <b>Breakfast</b>  | <b>Breakfast</b>  | <b>Breakfast</b>  |
| <b>Lunch</b>      | <b>Lunch</b>      | <b>Lunch</b>      | <b>Lunch</b>      | <b>Lunch</b>      |
| <b>Snack</b>      | <b>Snack</b>      | <b>Snack</b>      | <b>Snack</b>      | <b>Snack</b>      |



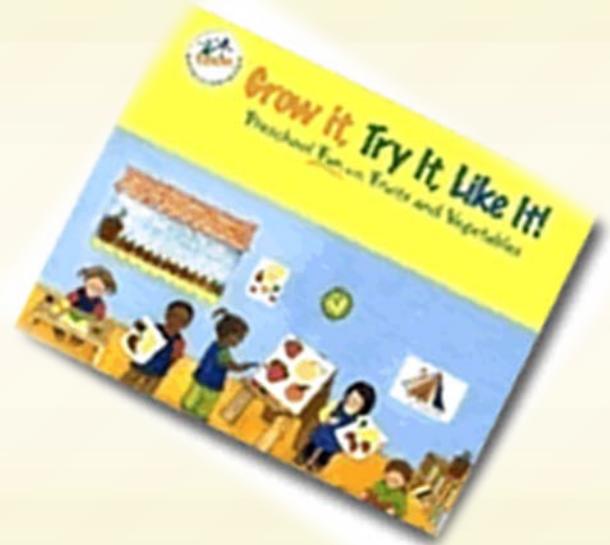
These menus meet or exceed the USDA requirements for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

# Nutrition Education

Ways children learn about nutrition:

- Formal classroom lessons
  - Start with 4-5 year olds
- Informal mealtime talk
- Exploring food with the senses
- Observing teachers, parents, peers
- USDA resources at

<http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/library.html>



# Nutrition Education

Meal time talk and exploration can:

- Reinforce the learning of color, flavors, smell, textures
  - Canned pineapple is tangy
  - Carrots are crunchy
  - Broccoli is green
  - Milk is smooth and white
- Show that you think these foods are good
  - “Steamed carrots are my favorite orange vegetable.”
  - “I eat carrots to help me see better.”
  - “These sweet strawberries make my mouth happy.”



# Food Outside of Meals

- Healthy parties and celebrations
- Healthy fundraising activities



# What's Wrong Here?



# What's Right Here?



**What would you like to change  
in your child care center's  
nutrition environment?**