



Tips for Family Style Dining

START WITH THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

When purchasing serving dishes, utensils and other place settings, keep in mind that they need to be kid-friendly and sized for little hands to maneuver.



REMEMBER EACH CHILD'S SKILL LEVEL

when choosing your menu. Finger foods and foods that are easy to navigate with a child-size fork or spoon are easiest to self-serve for younger children.

HAVE MULTIPLE SETS OF UTENSILS and serving spoons in case someone drops one on the floor.

GIVE EACH CHILD A TASK to help set the table. One child can set the plates, one can place the cups and so on. Children have a sense of pride and belonging when they have a contributing role.

Why You Should Serve Family Style

Family style dining encourages learning and development not only at the table but away from mealtime as well. Children learn independence, social skills, and other important habits that will last them through adulthood.



OFFER A VARIETY OF FAMILIAR FOODS and don't forget to introduce new foods. Children are more willing to try something new when they serve themselves.

RESERVE EXTRA SERVINGS for second helpings or in case the bowl of food gets contaminated.

PROVIDE A TRASH CAN for children in which to dispose napkins and uneaten food. Provide a tub for them to place dirty dishes after they scrape them off.

KEEP CLEANING SUPPLIES NEARBY Spills will happen. Be patient and use this opportunity as a teaching moment on how to clean-up.



Most importantly, **EAT WITH YOUR CHILDREN.** Children learn from good role models. Sitting with them while everyone eats also allows you to start positive mealtime conversations.

There are many benefits to serving your meals family style and it is not hard to implement. It may be as easy as putting the minimum serving of food required in serving dishes, placing it on the table and allowing children to serve themselves.

There is a learning curve to this method. However, this approach to mealtime creates a number of healthy habits that are important to the growth and development of children at any age. Children tend to eat more healthy foods if they see their friends try it. They learn skills such as taking turns, sharing and teamwork.

Family style dining opens up opportunities for conversation,

which increases vocabulary, promotes proper use of language and interaction with friends.

There are even more benefits that support healthy growth. Children learn:

- portion sizes for each food group,
- to recognize when they are hungry or satisfied,
- how to identify healthy foods and where they come from, and
- to improve fine motor skills.

Children are not the only ones who benefit. Providers get a better grasp of food costs, get help with mealtime service and, with less food being wasted, they save money.

There's nothing more exciting for children than being able to say, "I did it all by myself!"

- Jennifer from Mechanicsville, VA