

I Taught My Child Today...

by sitting around our table
and sharing a family style meal together.



Ideas to Promote Family Style Meals

- Encourage a simple routine to start getting ready to eat. For example, wash little hands before the meal, then, put on a bib or apron and talk about it as you do this together.
- Provide simple tasks for toddlers. For example, perhaps a toddler could help tear lettuce for a salad as part of the meal preparation or stir simple ingredients in a bowl. Let her help set the table by putting spoons on the table.
- Put food in bowls and encourage the child to scoop out his portion. This may require you to assist by giving hand-over-hand guidance and holding the bowl or platter for this process.
- Give your infant, who is able to safely sit in a high chair, a spoon to hold, even though she may be still using her little fingers to feed herself. This provides an introduction to utensil use even if it is only held for a few seconds.
- Model good manners during your meal together by encouraging the use of the words “please” and “thank you” or by saying, “Close your mouth as you chew” or “Use your napkin to wipe your mouth.”
- As you eat your meal together, talk about the colors, shapes, textures, temperatures and names of your food. Expand on your child’s vocabulary words in your mealtime conversations.

Family style mealtime is “chuck full” of many ways for parents to be the first teacher for their little one. At a closer glance, parents find that new skills are taught based on the age and abilities of their baby. For example, skills of passing, pouring, scooping, holding, eye-hand coordination, manners, language and cognitive development are enhanced during family style mealtime. Young children get to practice some of these skills daily through the mealtime experience.

Family ties are also strengthened. Families reconnect and focus on each other as they gather together after busy activities and responsibilities that pull them away in other directions. Trust develops, children eat healthier, mealtime is more relaxed, there is exposure to new foods, and social skills continue to mature. At the same time it, it is always important to supervise young children closely during mealtime to prevent falls, especially if children are using high chairs. Always use the seat belt. Food must be cut into small enough pieces so it is easy to chew and swallow. Use family style mealtime as a teaching and learning tool to enjoy happy, healthy and safe mealtimes together!

Resource: <http://www.parents.com/recipes/cooking/family-favorites/eating-dinner--family-style/>

Infancy Leadership Circle/Erie:

A Project of New York Zero-to-Three Network—Raising Voices For Babies