

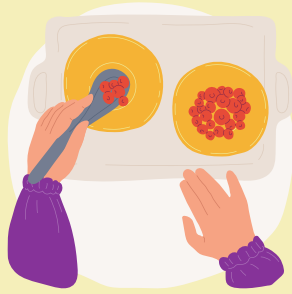
# Family Style Meals in Birth-5 ECEAP

## *Skills Learned During Family-Style Meals*

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) provides family-style meals to children, which encourage independence, improve fine-motor skills, expand social skills, and help children develop positive attitudes toward food and nutrition. Family-style meals in an ECEAP classroom are relaxed learning times that involve teachers and children sitting at the same table, children serving themselves when possible, and children eating together with teachers, as they model eating and appropriate portion sizes while sharing pleasant conversations. As children enjoy family-style meals, they also make connections to their home and cultural experiences. In ECEAP, teachers and staff understand that mealtimes are a learning opportunity and can also be individualized based on a child's development and interests. Teachers can also use mealtimes to assess and implement goals based on a child's individual needs.



## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT



- Tipping a pitcher of milk, passing out plates, holding utensils such as forks and serving spoons, can lead to improved fine motor skills.
- Children learn to serve themselves, which develops their eye-hand coordination.
- Encourages coordination and balance of large body movement (gross motor skills) to move chair, sit, and stand from chair.

Here are some examples of how children practicing family-style meals relates to the **physical** objectives found in The Creative Curriculum

### What a Child Might Do

Scoops and drops spoonful of mashed potatoes onto plate

Uses tongs to count and grab three chicken nuggets onto plate

### Objective/Dimension

Demonstrates fine-motor strength and coordination  
*Uses fingers and hands*

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### Related Objective/Dimension

Demonstrates positive approaches to learning  
*Persist*

Uses number concepts and operations  
*Counts*

### How this Relates to Literacy

Strengthening and controlling the hand muscles necessary for writing

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## LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT



- Conversations at mealtime can lead to an increased vocabulary.
- Allows children to have adult-child exchanges and the following of directions.
- Through peer-to-peer exchanges children build positive social skills.
- Creates opportunities for teachers to model language skills using a variety of descriptive words and simple sentences, asking open-ended questions, and allowing children to respond.

Here are some examples of how children practicing family-style meals relates to the **language** objectives found in The Creative Curriculum

### What a Child Might Do

Says, "We're having pears for snack?" "Yummy, I love pears, they are sweet!"

When reminded, waits for his turn to get a quesadilla

### Objective/Dimension

Uses language to express thoughts and needs  
*Uses an expanding expressive vocabulary*

Listens to and understands increasingly complex language  
*Follows directions*

### Related Objective/Dimension

Regulates own emotions  
*Manages feelings*

Regulates own emotions  
*Follows limits and expectations*

### How this Relates to Literacy

Engaging in conversation and using descriptive language

Building listening comprehension skills

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT



- Trying new foods encourages exploration and independence, which can lead to increased self-confidence.
- Encourages the development of impulse control by learning to wait, take turns, and share.
- Promotes self-awareness as the child recognizes himself or herself as a person with an identity, wants, needs, interests, likes, and dislikes.
- Allows time for conversations about food, the events of the day, the events to come, and things that occurred at home.
- Encourages interactions with adults and peers.
- Children gain an increasing awareness of his or her relationship to others in the classroom.

Here are some examples of how children practicing family-style meals relates to the **social-emotional** objectives found in The Creative Curriculum

### What a Child Might Do

Offers to help another child who is struggling to use the tongs to grab a quesadilla

Asks teacher politely for more milk because the pitcher is empty, and she and her peers are thirsty

### Objective/Dimension

Establishes and sustains positive relationships  
*Responds to emotional cues*

Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations  
*Balances needs and rights of self and others*

### Related Objective/Dimension

Demonstrates fine-motor strength and coordination  
*Uses fingers and hands*

Establishes and sustains positive relationships  
*Interacts with adults*

### How this Relates to Literacy

Strengthening and controlling the hand muscles necessary for writing

Uses language to communicate need for self and the group

## COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT



- Promotes use of tools and problem solving through manipulation of utensils.
- Teachers eating with children allows modeling of positive conversations and another way to deepen the learning from a previous activity.
- Children develop positive eating behaviors such as trying new foods, taking appropriate portion sizes, and recognizing hunger and fullness cues.

Here are some examples of how children practicing family-style meals relates to the **cognitive development** objectives found in The Creative Curriculum

### What a Child Might Do

Shares a story about making green juice with mom at home while eating green apple slices

Works with a friend to figure out how to open their individual fruit cup without spilling the juice

### Objective/Dimension

Remembers and connects experiences  
*- Recognizes and recalls*  
*- Makes connections*

Demonstrates positive approach to learning  
*Shows flexibility and inventive thinking*

### Related Objective/Dimension

Uses language to express thoughts and needs  
*Tells about another time and place*

Demonstrates fine-motor strength and coordination  
*Uses fingers and hands and expectations*

### How this Relates to Literacy

Uses language to express thoughts and feelings making connections to a previous experience

Using language to communicate ideas and solve problems



## Flexibility in Family-Style Meals

- It is important to take time to talk with families about their children's eating habits and food preferences, because food plays an essential role in family life and is part of many cultural traditions. Accommodations can be made so that all children are able to participate in family-style meals skill building.
  - 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.
  - Children with food allergies should have an individual care plan that is accessible to all adults working with the child.
  - Extra assistance and time should be provided for slow eaters.
  - The adults should encourage, but not force, the children to help themselves to all food components offered at the meal.
  - When children lack the developmental skills for self-feeding, they will be unable to serve food to themselves. An adult seated at the table can assist and be supportive with self-feeding, so the child can eat an adequate amount of food to promote growth and prevent hunger.

### What Families say about Family-Style Meals in ECEAP

“She really enjoys preschool and has grown a lot. It’s helped her with healthy eating, socializing, building relationships, and so much more.”

“We love the ECEAP program. Lots of help and information is provided/offered for the whole family to be healthy and successful.”

### Additional Resources

[www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate)

[www.myplate.gov/resources](http://www.myplate.gov/resources)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/browse/tag/family-style-meals>

[www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/family-style-meal-service-child-and-adult-care-food-program](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/family-style-meal-service-child-and-adult-care-food-program)

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