

# Mealtimes

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**Are you a healthy eater?** How does your approach to nutrition influence what and how you teach children about healthy eating?

**What should mealtimes be like for the children in your family child care home?** Should talking be encouraged? If so, who should talk? Should children be moving around or sitting down? Must children eat everything on their plates?

**Have you ever used food as a reward or punishment?** For example, have you ever given a child a cupcake for sitting still at lunch or not allowed a child to have a snack because he did not put his toys away? If so, what do you think the experience taught the child about food and eating?

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Mealtimes and related activities such as setting the table, washing hands, talking with others at the table, and brushing teeth are a very important part of life in a family child care home. They are also wonderful learning opportunities for children. During these activities, you interact with children and help them get to know one another. You help them develop good nutrition and health habits. During mealtimes, children explore the tastes, colors, textures, and aromas of foods, and they enjoy a sense of caring and community.

Mealtimes in a family child care home also provide opportunities for children to be involved in preparing food. We talk more about this in chapter 18, “Cooking.”

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