

What is Family Style Meal Service?



Family style is an optional type of meal service that allows children and adults to serve themselves food from communal platters, bowls, and pitchers. All required meal components are placed on the table at the same time and participants are allowed to choose the food items they want in the amount they want. Adequate amounts of each food must be provided in the minimum portions for each participant present. Additional amounts must be available if supervising staff are also eating. A supervising staff member may help participants who are unable to serve themselves, but portions served to the participant must be at least the minimum portion size.

Benefits of Family Style Meal Service

- Less waste! Participants can choose what foods they want to eat
- Allows participants to self-regulate and understand hunger signals
- Development of motor skills, dexterity, and hand strength
- Development of social skills through meal time conversation
- Role modeling from site staff
- Positive eating environment
- And lots more!

Tip: Serving bowls and pitchers should be small enough for participants to lift and pass around. Multiple bowls may be needed for full portions.



Family Style Meal Service at a Glance



Make sure the required full portions of each required component are on the table

Portion Size



Participants pass communal bowls and pitchers and serve themselves

Service Style



Participants choose the food item and the amount they want

Food Choice

7 Steps to a Complete Meal

- 1** Meals arrive in the dining area



- 2** Participants prepare for the meal – wash hands and sit at tables

- 3** Staff and volunteers set the table with all meal components and tableware

- 4** Everyone sits down to enjoy the meal – participants may start eating when an adult is seated at the table



- 5** A staff member takes the meal count

- 6** Enjoy the meal! Have positive conversations and encourage participants to try new foods

- 7** Clear the table and lead participants in hand washing before transitioning to the next activity



Family Style Meal Service Checklist



Before the meal:

- Food is delivered to the dining area within half an hour of meal service time at the proper temperatures
- Participants are washing hands before coming to the table
- All required meal components are on the table with minimum portion sizes for all participants and supervising staff
- Tableware and serving ware are appropriate for the age group

During the meal:

- Participants are all seated with staff at the table with full servings of all components before meal counts are taken
- Meal counts are only taken of participants seated at the table
- Participants are passing communal bowls and pitchers and are able to serve themselves
- Participants not taking a food item are encouraged to try some at a later time
- Participants who do not take full portions are encouraged to take more later but are not forced
- Any components that are served by a supervising staff is provided in the minimum portion required
- Supervising staff are role-modeling good meal time behavior
- Food is handled safely and dropped tableware and food items are not used or consumed