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COMPONENT: CHILD NUTRITION

SUBJECT: MEAL SERVICE

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE: To ensure that nutritional services contribute to the development and socialization of the children by providing a variety of foods are served to broaden each child’s food experiences. Food will not be used as a reward and each child is encouraged, not forced, to eat or taste their food. Children will be allowed a sufficient amount of time to eat without being rushed. Children and staff eat together family style and share the same menu to the extent possible. Medically-based diets or other dietary requirements will be accommodated. As developmentally appropriate, opportunity is provided for the involvement of children in food-related activities.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE:

All staff and children will share the same menu, to the extent possible. If a staff member and/or child has a special diet, this should be explained and used as a positive learning experience for all children. Staff must be sensitive to family customs that do not encourage children to participate in mealtime conversations. Family Advocates are expected to participate in at least three family style meals on occasion.

Staff will act as role models in an effort to model appropriate eating patterns and appropriate meal time behaviors, positive attitudes toward healthy foods, decision making skills, sharing, and communicating. Meals will be served in a pleasant, well lit, ventilated area which encourages socialization. Meals will be served in a family style manner and schedules will allow adequate time for children and staff to relax and enjoy their meals. Children who become restless before meal time is over may be allowed to get up and be directed towards another activity, after hands are washed, if staffing allows.

Head Start will provide appropriate child sized tables, chairs, utensils, trays, plates, cups, and serving items. Child sized items which help support and enhance each child’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills and abilities will be used

During meal times, children who are eating must be seated and staff must be seated while children are eating. A staff person must remain seated until all children have finished eating.

Teaching staff will encourage children to actively participate in meal time activities, after washing their hands, by:

- Having children help clean the tables;

- Allowing children to assist in setting the table; (trays, napkin, forks, spoons, milks, etc.)
- Encouraging children to serve themselves;
- Children will pass items to each other and staff will encourage children to use their manners;
- Children will be encouraged to use proper utensils for eating including forks, spoons, and knives;
- Encouraging conversations during meal time by asking open ended questions, modeling good listening skills, and encouraging turn-taking in conversation, encouraging children to compare and contrast and classify food attributes, such as taste, texture, shape, size, and color;
- Children should assist in cleaning up after meal time (emptying trays, wiping tables, etc.)

Staff must understand and recognize that children's eating patterns vary. Children may refuse foods, and staff and parents/guardians are encouraged to offer such foods again in the future as children require numerous exposures to new food before they will accept it.

When introducing new foods to children staff **must** not pester the child as it is not an effective strategy. Staff must not utilize gimmicks such as "clean plate club," "eating stars," "milk champions," etc. as these are not appropriate ways to encourage children to eat.