

Involve

children in food and fun

Young children have tremendous potential for establishing lifelong healthy eating habits when provided with positive and engaging learning experiences.

Taking stock . . . check your cupboard

Connect the topic to your life. What are your experiences, opinions, and concerns? What do you need?

Warm-up activity

Involving children in food and fun can take place in many ways. The first way we want to involve children is simply engaging them fully in the meal experience. This includes helping set the table, passing the food, serving themselves, and eating. In the Environment section we observed this on the video we watched. Reflect on how family-style service compares to the way meal service is done in your program.

Assemble your ingredients and tools

Acquire the knowledge and skills you need to create the outcome you desire.

Table discussion

Involving children with food at meals includes more than just family-style service. It also includes talking about food during meals. Have a conversation about the foods you are eating today using the following list of topics. Remember: Meals are more than just about feeding; they're also a time to learn. When children are trying something new, avoid asking children if they "like" a food; ask descriptive questions such as these instead:

- Describe what the foods look like — Ask questions about the colors, the shapes, the sizes.
- Identify what is in the food — What three fruits are in the salad? What vegetable is coleslaw made from? What vegetable is used to make the red sauce on the pizza pasta?
- Describe other sensory qualities — smell, texture, sound, mouthfeel, etc.
- Describe the flavor (NOT "Do you like it?" but rather, "What does it taste like?") Can they describe sweet, sour, spicy, salty, etc.? Does it taste like something else that's familiar?
- Talk about flavor combinations. What foods might taste really good served with _____? Talk about combining crunchy with soft, spicy with mild, crisp with creamy, etc.
- Talk about where the foods come from and how they are made.

At the end of this section there is a nutrition activity you can use in your classroom to help children try new foods.

Create your dish

Apply what you've learned to create the outcome you desire.



Involving children in food assembly saves you time and effort while at the same time building independence and self-help skills. Children as young as 2 years old and nearly all children by 3 years old can mix and pour, dip and spread, begin serving themselves, and certainly can feed themselves with age-appropriate utensils. Give them lots of opportunities to learn and master these skills!

Watch and Reflect

The video you will watch next shows children involved with food and nutrition at meals and snacks, and in classroom activities. You'll see them making their own breakfast wraps. You'll see them using their snack crackers as a math experience as they count them out and arrange them on their placemats. You'll see children making ants on a log as a snack and talking about how noisy celery is to eat. You'll see two classroom food activities: making a bagel giraffe in one classroom and making a banana snowman in another room. You'll see children playing two nutrition games with MyPyramid, the beginning of the food group game you saw in the first video, and then a BINGO game.

Group discussion

Brainstorm creative ways to incorporate more food and nutrition activities with children. These can include ideas you've already tried as well as new ideas. Write down on the next page of this workbook the ideas you want to try.

***Serve it* — A plan for staff training**

Select one or more of the ideas listed below to share with your staff ways to involve children with food and nutrition activities at meals, snacks, and in the classroom:

1. Show the Involve video clip. You will need a computer and projector or a DVD player and TV. Discuss the variety of ways you saw children “involved” at meals, snacks, and in the classroom. Make a list of ways you involve children currently and discuss what works well. Make a list of new ways you could involve children and select one to try first.
2. Bring in ingredients for a food assembly activity using a menu item you already serve, such as tacos or a sandwich, or the MyPyramid wraps (see the Create section for the recipe). While you make it together, discuss ways to serve other menu items “unassembled,” allowing the children to make their own.
3. Practice talking about food at meals, using the list on page 2 as a starting point.
4. Using the nutrition education resources you currently own, the lesson included in this section, or a new resource from those listed on the resources page, select a lesson to do with your staff. If possible, plan a meal or snack menu to coordinate with the lesson on the day/week it will be used.
5. Pick a week (or more) in the next month and pick a theme that lets you coordinate activities between your kitchen and the classroom. Themes could be a season, a holiday, or something being learned in the classroom (such as a color or shape). Have a menu item every day that goes with the theme, and use it in table conversations. Fun, new titles for menu items have been shown to improve children’s willingness to try the foods and to improve their intake. These titles can match your theme.

***Serve it* — A plan for parent education**

Share ideas with parents for getting their children involved in shopping, cooking, and cleaning up. You can share these ideas on menus, newsletters, handouts, or in parent meetings.

There are many resources for parents that have suggestions for making shopping together a learning experience, for involving children in the kitchen, and having children help with table-setting, serving, and cleaning up.

A parent meeting that has the parents, or the parents with their children, do a hands-on food activity is a great way to present the information that is most likely to lead to behavior change.

Refer to the resource list on page 15 for materials for parent education.

Savor it— Trying a new way to involve children in food and fun

Depending on how often you currently include food and nutrition activities in your meals and snacks, and in the classroom, strive to do it more often and/or try something new. There are many resources available on the resources page for fresh, new ideas. Work with the rest of your staff to select ideas to try.

The following pages provide an adaptation of one of the most popular activities from *Kid's Club: Nutrition Learning Activities for Young Children* by Barbara Mayfield. It is titled "I Try New Foods, Oh Yes I Do!" It is a great way to introduce young children to the adventure of trying new foods. It works well in one sitting, or broken up over several days. When planning to try a new food on your menu, use portions of this activity to introduce the new food.

"I Try New Foods . . . Oh, Yes I Do!"

Purpose

Children learn that trying new foods is a fun adventure experienced through all of our senses.

Key concepts

- ▶ Foods are different in many ways.
- ▶ We experience foods using all of our senses.
- ▶ Trying new foods is fun and important for eating a variety of foods.

Supplies

- ▶ Create a "Wonder Box" by covering a shoebox with bright paper and stickers. Place several less familiar fruits or vegetables inside the box and close the lid.
- ▶ Select a story about "picky eaters" from the following list to read to your children:
 - *Bread and Jam for Frances* by Russell Hoban
Frances is a young badger who wants bread and jam for every meal until that's all her mother serves her. Frances decides she enjoys eating a wider variety of foods. (A longer book suitable for older preschoolers. Available in Spanish.)
 - *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss
A classic tale of not wanting to try a new food, taking a taste, and then discovering we like it. (Available in Spanish)
 - *Oliver's Milkshake* by Vivian French (*Oliver's Vegetables, Oliver's Fruit Salad*)
Oliver is a picky eater. He knows what he likes and what he doesn't, but his Aunt Jen is determined to change his ways. "What you need," she says, "is one of my yummy milkshakes." And amazingly, Oliver doesn't even put up a fight.

- *Picky Nicky* by Cathy East Dubowski
Picky Nicky learns to try different foods.
 - *I will Never NOT Ever Eat a Tomato* by Lauren Child
Charlie convinces his sister Lola to eat foods she doesn't like by giving them new, silly names.
 - *The Seven Silly Eaters* by Mary Ann Hoberman
A mother raises seven fussy eaters by fixing them each exactly what they want. They in turn fix her a birthday surprise.
 - *More Cheese, Please!* by Cook Communications Ministries
Lulu likes eating cheese, cheese, and more cheese, but her mother would like her to try all the different foods God has created.
 - *Mommy Ant, Eat Your Vegetables!* by Sigmund Brouwer
Mommy Ant tries unsuccessfully to get her children to eat their vegetables when they point out that she doesn't eat her vegetables and they want to be just like her.
 - *D. W. the Picky Eater* by Marc Brown
Arthur the aardvark's younger sister, D.W., finds all sorts of ways to avoid foods she doesn't like, so she has to stay home when her family eats out. Feeling left out, she decides she will try a new food in a restaurant and discovers she likes something she thought she hated.
- ▶ Select a variety of food models or pictures of foods (such as the ones available from Dairy Council) with different colors, sizes, and shapes.
 - ▶ Make "smelly boxes" by placing several foods with distinctive smells (onion, lemon, cinnamon, etc.) in small opaque containers (such as margarine tubs), with holes poked in the lid.
 - ▶ Create one or more "feely boxes" with coffee cans or oatmeal containers covered with large, brightly colored socks. In each container place one of each of the unusual foods that are also in the Wonder Box.
 - ▶ Make "tasting plates" by drawing a large X with black marker on paper plates, one for each child. In each quadrant place one of the following four items: a sugar cube, a small lemon wedge, a small salted pretzel, a small amount of instant coffee granules.
 - ▶ Prepare to examine and taste unusual foods with a cutting board and knife, samples cut ready to taste, and plates and utensils for each child.
 - ▶ Three puppets. Puppets 1 and 2 will be "kids" and Puppet 3 will be an "adult," or can be an actual teacher rather than a puppet. The script for the puppet show is at the end of this activity.

Introduction

DO: Hold up a food from Wonder Box.

SAY: “Do you know what this food is? Has anyone ever eaten this before? Would you like to try it?” (*Repeat for all foods in the Wonder Box.*)
“We’ll all get to try these foods later. But first we’re going to learn why it’s important to learn about new foods and how foods look, smell, feel, sound, and taste different. Let’s begin with a story about someone who did not want to try something new . . .”

Story

DO: Read the story you selected and discuss what the main character learned about trying something new.

Discovery activity

DO: Using food models or pictures, select a variety of foods with different colors, sizes, and shapes and place in the center of a circle or table.

SAY: “We learn about food using our eyes, our nose, our mouth, our hands, and even our ears. As I mention those parts of our bodies, I’d like you to point to that part of your body.”

“Let’s begin by looking with our *eyes*.”

“Look at all of these foods: Are they all the same color?”

“Can you find two foods that are the same color?”

“Are they all the same shape? Are they all the same size?”

“Isn’t it nice that all foods don’t look the same?”

“Now let’s talk about what we can learn using our *ears*.”

“Have you ever thought about the sounds that different foods make when you eat them?”

“Some foods are noisy to eat and some foods are quiet. Can you pick out a food that makes noise when you eat it?”

“What does it sound like?”

“Which of these foods can be eaten without making a sound?”

“That’s right. It’s a soft quiet food.”

DO: Prepare to pass around the “smelly boxes.”

SAY: “What’s this?” (*Point to your nose.*)

“Where’s yours? What does your nose do?”

“Do all foods smell the same?”

“Let’s see if you can guess what foods I have in these containers.” (*Allow all children a chance to smell the food(s) and then guess what they are.*)

“Did you know that we can’t taste a food if we can’t smell it? That’s why when you’re sick, food doesn’t taste the same.”



DO: Prepare to pass around the “feely boxes.”

SAY: “Let’s see if we can guess what a food is by feeling it with our *hands* but not looking at it with our eyes. I have one of the foods from my Wonder Box in here and you can each take a turn reaching inside and touching it. If you think you know what it is, keep it a secret until everyone has a chance to touch it. Please be gentle when you reach inside so you don’t squish it.”

(While children are feeling, ask the following questions.)

“Is it smooth, or bumpy, or fuzzy, or spiky?”

“Is it big or little? Light or heavy? Soft or hard? Short or long? Skinny or fat?”

(After everyone has had a turn, ask the children to guess what it was, then pull out the food and show them what it is.)

Taste Bud Detectives

DO: Prepare to use the “tasting plates.”

SAY: “We can taste the different flavors in foods using our *tongues*. Stick out your tongues. Our tongues have tiny bumps on them called taste buds. Feel your tongue with your finger — feel the little tiny taste buds?”

“Your taste buds can tell you whether a food is salty, or sweet, or sour, or bitter. We’re going to taste four different foods — one of each taste. Let’s see if you can decide which food is sweet, which one is sour, which one is salty, and which one is bitter.”

A tasting adventure

DO: Prepare to taste the unusual foods in the Wonder Box by having a cutting board and knife, samples cut ready to taste, and plates and utensils for each child.

SAY: “When we have a new food, we might be a little afraid to put it in our mouths right away. That’s OK. It’s scary sometimes to try new things. Before we taste it, it’s good to “taste” it first with our eyes and nose. Let’s look inside each of these new foods. Let’s start by guessing what each one will look like inside.” *(Have them guess the color and appearance before cutting each one open and exploring what is inside. Will it have a pit? Seeds? Etc. Match the samples to taste with the whole food. Allow children to select which ones they would like on their plates).*

“Look at the plate of new foods you’ll be trying.”

“What is this food’s color? Shape? Size?”

“How does it feel? Is it hard? Soft? Smooth? Crunchy?”

“How do you think it will feel in your mouth?”

“Is it hot? Warm? Cold?”

“How does it smell?”

“Do you think it will make a sound when we eat it?”

“When you taste a new food, you may decide you really like it and want to gobble it all up. But if you taste a new food and don’t like it yet, it’s OK if you don’t want to swallow it. If you want to spit it out, cover your mouth with your napkin and put the food inside very carefully. But nobody can say “YUCK!” “Yuck” is not allowed.”

“Now, who would like to take the first taste?” *(Ask the volunteer to put the food in his or her mouth and describe its taste and texture).*

“Just put a tiny bite on your tongue. How does it feel?”

“Does it make a sound when you chew it?”

“What does it taste like?”

“Anyone else want to try a food?”

Puppet show: 'The New Foods Tasting Party'

You will need three puppets, Puppets 1 and 2 will be "kids" and Puppet 3 will be an "adult" or can be an actual teacher rather than puppet. Insert your puppets' names as appropriate when you present the puppet show, using the following script.

NARRATOR: "Puppet 1 _____ and Puppet 2 _____ had been playing all Saturday afternoon. They played ball and played on the swings. They were pretty worn out. Puppet 1 _____ looked especially tired."

Puppet 2 _____: "What's the matter?"

Puppet 1 _____: "I'm starving and I don't have any money to buy candy."

Puppet 2 _____: "You're in luck," " _____ (Puppet 3) is having a new foods party today!"

Puppet 1 _____: "New foods? I'm not sure I like new foods."

Puppet 2 _____: "I thought you were starving."

Puppet 1 _____: "I am really, really hungry. I guess it wouldn't hurt to take a look."

NARRATOR: "Puppet 1 _____ and Puppet 2 _____ walked to (*location of class*) _____ where Puppet 3 _____ greeted them at the door."

Puppet 3 _____: "Hi, kids. Welcome to the tasting party! The new foods are over there. Wash your hands first, and then help yourself."

NARRATOR: "Puppet 1 _____ and Puppet 2 _____ washed their hands and then wandered over to the table with all the new foods."

Puppet 1 _____: "Wow! "Look at all these different foods! But I don't know what anything is. I can't eat something if I don't know what it is."

Puppet 3 _____: "The kids at (*name your program*) _____ know what all of these foods are; they've just tasted them. I'll bet they'd be happy to tell you what they are. Kids, let's help (Puppet 1) _____ learn about these foods. Can you tell him/her what each one is and something about it?"

Puppet 1 _____: (*Picks up one of the new foods, and asks*), "What's this food? Is it crunchy? Smooth? Sweet?"

NARRATOR: "What do you think kids? (*Have children describe foods.*)

Puppet 1 _____: (*Examines each of the foods on the table and says*), "I feel like eating something (*sweet, sour, crunchy, etc.*). What food should I try?"

NARRATOR: "What do you think kids?" (*Allow for responses.*)

"Puppet 1 _____ ate the _____ and loved it."

Puppet 1 _____: "What food was your favorite?"

Puppet 2 _____: "They were all so good. But, I think my favorite was the _____. Did you find a new food you liked, Puppet 1 _____?"

Puppet 1 _____: "I did! I really did. I didn't think I would like new foods, but I do! I like trying new foods, and I hope other kids like me will try new foods, too!"

Closing

SAY: "What did (Puppet 1) _____ learn about trying new foods?"

"What did we learn about trying new foods?"

"When we try new foods, does that mean we have to put the foods in our mouths? We can, but we can also try them with our eyes, and ears, and noses. Next time we have a new food, how can we try it?" (*If you will be having something new, talk about it now.*)

"It's OK not to eat it. It's OK to not even taste it. It's OK to not put it on your plate and just say, "No, thank you" when it comes by. You can put it on your plate or leave it off, that's up to you. But, it's not OK not to learn about it. The more we learn about new foods, the more new foods we'll like!"

References and resources

- www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/nibbles.html
This is a newsletter for parents of young children on a variety of nutrition topics.
- www.touchingheartstouchingminds.com
Click on “Healthy Eating” in the drop-down menu under “Emotion-Based Materials.” There are many topics you can select using the pull-down menu. There is a handout and a discussion guide with each topic.
- <http://betterkidcare.psu.edu/CaringForKids/CaringforKids3-5.pdf>
(a 4-page PDF file) has lessons for teaching children about food and nutrition with cooking activities.
- www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/fun_preschoolers.pdf
is the Food and Nutrition Information Center's 25-page PDF document *Food and Nutrition Fun for Preschoolers 2008*, including an extensive list of food-, nutrition-, and activity-related books.
- www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/pubs/bibs/gen/ethnic.pdf
is the Food and Nutrition Information Center's 32-page PDF document, *Cultural and Ethnic Food and Nutrition Education Materials: A Resource List for Educators*.
- http://foodstamp.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp/resource_finder_details.php?id=313
is a downloadable nutrition education resource titled *Kids a Cookin' & Movin'* that includes four lessons, eight recipes, and video and audio clips.
- www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=247
is a National Food Service Management Institute nutrition education program titled *More Than Mud Pies*.
- www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/gallery/wic_fam3.htm#infants
is the WIC program's Web site, which includes nutrition education resources for young children.
- http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Iowa/Setting_the_Stage_Child_Development_Homes.pdf is an 85-page PDF file of physical activity and nutrition education activity cards from Iowa Team Nutrition.
- <http://www.nationaldairycouncil.org>
Contact the national or your state Dairy Council for nutrition education resources, such as the food models used in the nutrition education lesson.
- *Raising Healthy Eaters* has lessons with lots of ideas for parents and children to be involved together in food and nutrition activities. In Indiana, contact the Purdue Extension office in your county for more information.
www.extension.purdue.edu/extsite/counties.shtml

