

# Family-Style Dining More Than Just a Meal

Family-style dining turns everyday meals into meaningful opportunities for children to grow, learn, and connect.



## What are the benefits of family-style dining?

- ☐ Builds independence. Children gain confidence by serving themselves and managing their own space.
- ☐ Encourages social skills. Sharing food, passing dishes, and talking with others builds cooperation and communication.
- ☐ Promotes healthy eating. Watching others enjoy nutritious foods encourages children to try new foods and learn portion control.
- ☐ Supports language development. Conversations at the table help children expand their vocabulary and communication skills.
- ☐ Creates routine and comfort. Regular, shared meals provide structure and a sense of belonging.

## How can I successfully implement family-style dining in the classroom?

- ☐ Use colorful, child-friendly dishware and utensils (and have extra sets ready).
- ☐ Provide child-sized chairs and tables to support independence.
- ☐ Keep cleaning supplies handy but safely out of reach.
- ☐ Encourage every child's voice to be heard during mealtime.
- ☐ Plan for flexibility to meet each child's needs and preferences.
- ☐ Consider dietary restrictions and cultural preferences for inclusivity.
- ☐ Keep routines consistent so children know what to expect.

## How can I help families extend family-style dining at home?

- ☐ Encourage families to involve their children in preparing and setting the table.
- ☐ Suggest creating a screen-free environment so everyone can focus on being together.
- ☐ Support children's independence by allowing them to serve themselves when possible.
- ☐ Recommend using mealtime as an opportunity to talk about everyone's day and strengthen family connections.
- ☐ Remind families to keep mealtime positive, relaxed, and centered on togetherness.

## How can teachers and families work together?

- ☐ Share updates about how children participate in family-style dining at school.
- ☐ Provide families with information about its benefits.
- ☐ Encourage families to try shared meals at home.
- ☐ Celebrate children's progress in building independence and social skills.
- ☐ Celebrate their efforts, even if the meal gets a little messy!

**Family-style dining isn't just about eating. It's about learning, growing, and connecting.**

For more resources on child development and early learning, visit [chslearn.org/resources/for-professionals](https://chslearn.org/resources/for-professionals)

## NOTES

---

---

---

---



Catherine  
Hershey  
Schools  
*for early learning*

