Sandbox Playcare Childcare Home

Garden City, Kansas
Debbie Tomlin, Owner

Best Practice

Singing a song makes trying new foods easy!

My greatest accomplishment in my childcare home related to meal service is feeding the kids nutritious meals and have them actually *like* the meals they are eating.

Offering a healthy meal seems to give the kids more energy (although on some days they don't need the extra energy). They also seem to play better, have less of an "attitude," and get along better with their peers because their tummies are full of the right foods. They don't ask for snacks all day long when they get a balanced meal and a good snack.

TIP

Don't be afraid to enroll in CACFP. The Federal Government pays you for feeding the kids and they teach you how to eat healthy, not just for you, but for your family also.

State reviewers are also very nice and friendly to you and the kids. My kids love to see them come, so they can tell someone new about their day. At trainings, State reviewers give us ideas on games to play with the kids that keep them moving and songs to sing. I make up some songs just to get the kids to try new foods. We can't expect the kids to try something new if we, as providers, don't try.

Bristol Preschool Child Care Center, Inc.

Bristol, Connecticut
Shirley Anderson

Gardening activities help make mealtime more meaningful!

Best Practice

We created a "children's vegetable garden" at our center.

Teachers plant the seeds with the children and children are responsible for watering and weeding the gardens. During the summer, children actually collected the vegetables, brought them to the kitchen for the cook to prepare, and ate them with their lunch. City children were especially excited with this process, and I believe it encouraged them to eat the vegetables they grew.

TIP

Continue to offer "different foods" and if possible engage children in the process – whether it is growing the vegetables or purchasing them.

If you engage them and encourage them, they will try something new. We also took a closer look at our menus and found ways to have less processed foods offered, which increased whole-grain consumption. We also increase our "outside times" in the morning and afternoon – offering one hour in the morning and at least another hour in the afternoon with "planned" outdoor games versus free play.

Bundle of Joy

Fort Worth, Texas
Lucile McKnight

Best Practice

Build fun, healthy activities around the food you serve!

In my child care home, we offer activities throughout the day that teach the children about foods that are good for the body.

During some of the activities, the children sing along with the tape. They learn how the food we like to eat builds their bodies and makes them strong.

TIP

Find ways to incorporate healthy activities into your homes or center daily before any meal time.

This allows the children to think about the food being served. For example, you can tell them about all the wonderful colors of our veggies. Most of all, tell your children how great foods make our heart healthy and strong.

Youth and Family Outreach

Portland, Maine
Camelia Babson-Haley, Director

Best Practice

Tap into local food providers for fresh food options!

In the last year, we have completely transformed the way in which we manage our food program. We have successfully transformed our food production to be completely from scratch.

All of the foods used in the kitchen are whole foods (primarily fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean fresh protein). We have successfully begun to involve the children in understanding where their food comes from by installing four raised garden beds. The children started seedlings in their classrooms, transplanted them to the beds, cared for them during the growing season, and then harvested them for their lunches as the vegetables were ready.

Additionally, we have begun sourcing approximately 50 percent of our food locally. We have fresh bread, English muffins, and rolls delivered weekly from a local bakery that are made specific to our children's dietary needs and are less expensive than a loaf of whole-wheat bread at a local grocery store. We have fresh produce delivered from a local farm, and our wheat flour, rye flour, and dry beans are purchased from another local venue.

TIP

This can be done on a budget. We have only increased our total cost by about $20 per week.

By making three lunches a week vegetarian and preparing meals using seasonal produce, we have learned we can still provide variety and high-quality nutritious meals on a budget.

Little Star's Family Daycare and Preschool

Pittsburg, California
Irma Rivera

Best Practice

Use games to get children excited about eating and trying new foods.

My greatest accomplishment is that I am now giving the children brown rice and whole-grain pasta.

The children love it. They eat whole fruits and veggies. This all came about after I started a new menu with the children, but first I began to eat the new foods. As the children watched me eating these new foods, the children would ask me what I was eating. I would share with them and I would ask them questions like: "Do you like the taste? What does it feel like in your mouth? Would you like to eat this for lunch?" By the end of the week, I had them so excited about trying these new foods that they couldn't wait for Monday to roll around! I never tried offering new foods before because I was afraid that they wouldn't like it. Now that they are eating better, I have never had a problem with them not liking what is offered, and now they go home telling their parents that they want them to cook like "Titi" (me).

TIP

Make everything a game. The children will always have fun with it.

The better the children eat, the better you will eat, and the more physical activity they do, the more you will do. It is a win-win situation. You will feel better, and the children will have more fun with you.

Elizabeth's Child Care

Georgetown, Kentucky
Elizabeth Maggard, Owner

Encourage movement and excitement for healthy eating by playing "hide the fruit"!

Best Practice

I enrolled in the Federal Food Program to promote healthy nutrition within my program, and I am participating in the Healthier Kentucky Challenge which recognizes excellence in nutrition and physical activity.

We have 30+ minutes of structured physical activity each day. I have set up an obstacle course for the children to run each day. I add new challenges each week. I also make up songs about the fruits and vegetables of the day to get the children up and moving. Plus, it gets them excited to try that fruit or vegetable at meal time. Sometimes we also play a game of "hide the fruit." We hide oranges and apples around the playground, and have the children help find them. After the game, we rinse the fruit thoroughly, and everyone sits down for a healthy snack.

TIP

There are many valuable ways to gain information about healthier foods and physical activity.

The Internet has all kinds of information for some great ideas. Your local health department may have health and nutrition nurses, who will come into your program and offer their help. Your local child care food coordinator, doctors' offices, pediatric offices, dentists' offices, and grocery store can also be of assistance. You can also contact your local Child Care Council for pamphlets or brochures, and trainings on healthy foods and physical activity.

Just remember, a healthy lifestyle begins with a proper diet. Healthy eating is important for the proper formation of bones, teeth, muscles, and a healthy heart. Diet can affect growth and development in small children. Childhood obesity is a problem and, by promoting a healthy diet, children can maintain a healthy weight and stay healthy as they grow into young adults.

Cumberland County YMCA

Portland, Maine
(sites at Brown, Dyer, Skillin, and Small)
Kerry Salvo

Best Practice

Partner with a nearby university or college to bring nutrition & physical activity programs to your child care center or home.

When I began at the YMCA in fall 2009, we had just received a grant to integrate the CATCH Kids Club into our after school programs. I attended a train-the-trainer for CATCH and since then, all staff have been trained to use it.

Some of the physical activity games are more popular than others and some staff took longer to warm up to the curriculum, but now, all staff try to use CATCH at least 3 days per week. Our site at Skillin School is over 50 percent free/reduced lunch. So, in 2011, we partnered with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension's Eat Well program and a nutritionist visited our after school program twice a month to prepare healthy snacks and do a nutrition lesson with students.

TIP

Stick with it and show kids it is fun! Sometimes students are reluctant to try new things – snacks, games, etc.

But, if you keep with it and make it an expectation, eventually they will join in or give it a try. At one site, kids really didn't enjoy CATCH and other group games. They protested and complained, but my staff member kept with it – starting with smaller doses and working up to more minutes of structured play per day. The kids now expect it, look forward to it, and willingly participate. Our other staff is impressed with how this has worked at the one site.

JoAnn's Helping Hands

Sterling Heights, Michigan
JoAnn Clarke, Owner

Best Practice

Since JoAnn's Helping Hands' inception, I have been told by the parents that their children are fed better here than even their own homes. I love to cook for my own family, and our dinner today is the lunch recipe tomorrow for the daycare children.

I use very little, if any, prepared food, so the children are getting well-balanced, home-cooked meals with lots of fresh veggies and seasonal fruit. I have a "no thank you" rule where every child has to take at least a "no thank you" bite. More times than not, the children are more apt to eat something because everyone else is eating, which means more nutritious eating and less throwing away.

After breakfast in the mornings, the children are still waking up but their systems are getting in gear from a good breakfast. We like to put music on and jump and dance either by themselves, in a group, or with a partner. We also have days when we just need to "chill out" and stay in our own spaces. It's not unusual for the children to sit with me and do yoga stretches or some relaxation poses to help calm them and concentrate on just themselves.

Ideas for active play!

TIP

I tell my daycare children/families that they are mine during the day.

My advice to other providers is to prepare your menus, and make food choices you would want your own child to be served. I also serve the food on cute plates with dividers. Get the children involved in menu planning too. Maybe make one week out of the month children's choice, and ask different children to make a good choice for one of the meals your program offers. They are so proud on "their days" and it also encourages them to eat healthier when they're at home too!

King's Kids Child Development Center

Snow Hill, Maryland
Davida Washington

Make an impact that will also affect children at home – invite families to participate in activities.

Best Practice

King's Kids collaborated with their local YMCA and county health department to host two "Family Fun Nights" for the center's children and families.

A nutritionist from the health department provided nutrition education to the families, with activities for them to follow up with at home. The YMCA staff conducted physical activities with the families and provided suggestions for age-appropriate activities that they could do at home. The family nights were so successful that the center plans to continue them in the future.

TIP

New fruits and vegetables were introduced through regular cooking activities and taste tests.

Once the new foods were introduced, they were ultimately added to the center's menus, significantly increasing the variety of fruits and vegetables consumed by the children during mealtimes.

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My Notes: