

Exploring

children's health and wellness

Capital District Child Care Council *a tipsheet for parents and caregivers of children*

Mealtime with Preschoolers

Regularly sitting down together for meals has been shown to improve the nutritional quality of children's meals. Eating together can be an important bonding experience for children. Creating a "family" mealtime environment at child care or school is a great way to encourage healthy eating and healthy social development among children. Families and Child Care providers should consider the following:

- Serve meals in a calm, relaxed environment.
- Encourage conversation among the children.
- Allow children to serve their own portions of food as well as to decide how much to eat. Encourage them to take a small amount of a new food and to just look at it and smell it. When children serve themselves, they are more likely to try new foods.
- Offer new foods multiple times. Serve foods in various forms to provide more opportunities
- Children respond negatively to pressure to eat, and will be more likely to try something if it is simply offered to them. You may need to offer a new food up to 15 times before a child will try it.
- Be a role model for healthy eating. If children see their parents or care providers eating fruits and vegetables, they are more likely to eat them, even if they are not ready to try them just yet.
- Allow children to leave the table when they are full. When children are full, they are no longer interested in food. It is difficult for a child to sit still when there is nothing of interest for him or her to do. Have some activities ready for children to join into when they are finished eating and cleaning up.
- If a child spills, help him or her clean up to promote independence.

Eating together can be an important bonding experience

