

## Notes about this Document

The Positive Eating Environment Action Plan is an interactive tool. The interactivity is demonstrated in this document using icons, as explained below:

- This icon indicates an accordion menu that expands when clicked (in the online tool).
- (+) This icon indicates that this item and your notes can be added to your action plan.

## Welcome to the Positive Eating Environment Action Plan

### Activity Intro

Hello! This tool helps you build or improve an action plan for creating a positive eating environment in your program.

A positive eating environment:

- Serves family style meals
- Allows children to choose which and how much of the healthy foods offered they will eat
- Involves children in pre- and post-mealtime activities (with supervision)
- Encourages children to listen to their hunger and fullness cues
- Avoids the use of food as a reward or punishment
- Can support a child's healthy food preferences

To begin, you'll need the results of your [Positive Eating Environment Self-Assessment](#). If it's not done, finish that first. The self-assessment identifies possible goals for your action plan.

*Button Text:* Continue

### Here's How This Tool Works

Choose one section from your self-assessment, probably where your self-assessment shows the most need for work. Sections are:

1. Fruits
2. Vegetables
3. Beverages
4. Meal Planning
5. Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time

Look at recommended practices matched to the questions in your self-assessment to help you create a plan that's appropriate for your program. You will find helpful information within:

- Policies
- Menu Selection
- Program Environment

Select recommended practices you want to improve. You can select from the example objectives or choose to build your own. Review and print your own action plan.

You can use this tool again later to take action on new goals.

*Button Text:* Continue

### Tell Us About Your Program

Information will be tailored to your program type

I work in: -- Choose – [Dropdown Box]

Dropdown Box Text:

Center-based care

Family based care

Home visiting

*Button Text:* Continue

## Center-based care

### Choose A Goal

Look at the results from your Positive Eating Environment Self-Assessment. Choose one area from the Self-Assessment to work on in your program.

[Tip] Start with the most challenging section. This is probably a section where you often checked “Never” and/or “Ready to Get Started.”

I want to start with: -- Choose – [Dropdown Box]

Dropdown Box Text:

Fruits

Vegetables

Beverages

Meal Planning

Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time

### Fruits

Great choice! Offering fruits regularly during meals and snacks can build healthy strong eating habits and get children ready to learn!

Fruits have nutrients such as:

- Vitamin A (supports vision; helps stop infections)
- Vitamin C (good for teeth and gums)
- Fiber (good for digestive health)

[Tip] Be careful of extra sugar in fruit juice or canned fruits. Sugar can cause dental problems and excess weight. Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

### Standards For Fruits

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today’s early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFO3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
    - 4.7.0.1 Nutrition Learning Experiences for Children
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44

- Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
- Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
  - § 226.20 Requirements for meals
    - (3) Fruits. A serving may contain fresh, frozen, canned, dried fruits, or fruit juice. All fruits are based on their volume as served, except that ¼ cup of dried fruit counts as ½ cup of fruit
    - (i) Pasteurized, full-strength fruit juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Fruit juice or vegetable juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Fruits

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Fruits. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Policies guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

#### ➤ Supporting Healthy Meals (+)

Creating a positive eating environment takes time, patience, and planning. Think about ways to build parts of the positive eating environment into your current practices even if your setting does not allow family-style dining. For example, how can staff engage children in positive, give-and-take conversation during mealtime? What policies can support these changes?

Think of ways to:

- Support staff. Sometimes, state licensing requirements have larger staff/child ratios. This can be difficult because mealtimes can be messy, making it hard to serve meals family-style. A policy supporting smaller staff/child ratios is one way to help staff during mealtime [[Center-based care, Head Start](#)]
- Support children. Hopefully you are able to offer family-style dining in your center. However, children, especially toddlers, may need help building skills in self-serving and mealtime behaviors such as sharing and passing. Think how your policies might support these skills. Are children offered the opportunity to practice pouring or self-serving during pretend play or snack time?

#### ➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Many adults struggle with their own eating habits and what foods they view as healthy or tasty. A good place to start might be to ask staff their views of program menus and healthier foods. Think about these

questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

If you do not have a contracted Registered Dietitian (RD), look to your local community. Agencies that support child nutrition include Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), the extension office, and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) centers. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the resource section for more information.

Example policy: *Annually, staff will be offered training in healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty, such as a registered dietitian.*

➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

➤ Nutrition Education (+)

When considering changes to your menus or food service, it may be helpful to think about the role nutrition education can play. Incorporating healthy foods into weekly or monthly lesson plans can allow children to become more comfortable with new fruits, so they are more willing to try them at meals. A program policy defining nutrition education in your program and how often it should be used in lesson planning can be helpful. Remember, nutrition education is not only about healthy vs. unhealthy foods. [Healthy foods can be used to teach](#) colors, shapes, textures, science (how things grow), math (counting, sorting, and graphing).

Example policy: *The program will incorporate healthy foods into classroom lesson plans at least once a month. All effort will be made to use foods represented on the month's program menus.*

## Menu Selection

Having nutritious menus are important to improving children's health. Serving fruit in your program is a great way for children to get the nutrients they need. Try increasing the amount of fruits you serve daily, and work with families to try new fruits at home. Remember, we want children to eat at least [five fruits and vegetables](#) throughout the day, both at home and in your program.

➤ Fruit Is Available Daily (+)

Increase the amount of fruit you serve in your program. You can do this by offering a different fruit at every meal. It might be helpful to consider using fruits in season and partnering with local farmers and/or community gardens. While fresh is best, frozen or even canned fruit packed in water or 100 percent juice (not syrup) still offer important nutrients while being less expensive than fresh.

Example objectives:

- We will add one additional fruit daily to our menu.
- Our program will substitute fruit for 100 percent juice twice a week.
- Our program will offer fruit during snack time; for example, substitute apple slices for graham crackers.

- Fruit Options Include Fresh, Frozen, and Canned Fruit Packed in Water or 100 Percent Juist (Not Packed in Light or Heavy Syrup) (+)  
Fresh fruit is best but can be expensive. Using local or seasonal produce can help your program offer fresh produce while staying within budget. Frozen and/or canned fruit packed in water or 100 percent juice (not syrup) are also acceptable, healthy alternatives to fresh fruit.

Example objectives:

- In the next six months, our program will substitute all fruit canned in syrup with fruit canned in water.
- Our program will serve one seasonal fruit monthly.
- Our program will serve one fresh fruit weekly.

- Fruit Options Are Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)  
[Family style meals](#) are important to building a child's ability to listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues, determine servings sizes, and try new foods. Make mealtime an opportunity for children to try new fruits and practice serving themselves.

Example objectives:

1. Measuring cups will be used as serving utensils (1/4 cup of fruit for toddlers; 1/2 cup for preschoolers).
2. Staff will receive annual training on family-style dining.
3. Child-size equipment such as utensils, bowls, cups, and pitchers will be used during meals.
4. In the next month, fruits will be served at the same time and with the same presentation even if served as "dessert."
5. The program director will conduct monthly observations of mealtimes to find areas of improvement in family-style meal service.

## Program Environment

Your program spends considerable time establishing a safe and engaging [learning environment](#). Your mealtime is also a learning environment. During mealtimes, children learn healthy habits such as trying new foods, listening to their body's signs of hunger and fullness, and table manners.

- All Fruit Names Are Introduced to the Children Prior to the Meal or Snack (+)  
The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of fruits. When you make additions or changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.  
Example objectives:
  1. Program staff (assign a responsible person) will post pictures of fruits from the menus monthly around the classroom.
  2. One lesson plan a month will use fruits from that month's menu.
  3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new fruits. Family activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.
- Fruit Names Are Written and/or Pictured Near Where Children Eat (+)  
The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of fruits. When you make additions or changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

1. Pictures and words of fruits near the eating areas will be posted and updated monthly.
2. Program staff (i.e. teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a new food from the program menu at least once a month.
3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new fruits. Family activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.

- **Providers Role Model to Children How to Serve Themselves and Participate in Family-style Dining (+)**  
Adults show examples of how to behave, interact with others, build friendships, and even eat during mealtime. Adults can role model positive mealtime behaviors by eating the same food, using positive language, and avoid bringing in outside food or drink when eating with children.  
Engage staff early and often when implementing program changes. Try creating a team with your staff to plan and implement the changes from your action plan. Have staff think about:
1. What changes can they make?
  2. What do they need to make this change (i.e. training, resources, support)?
  3. What are challenges will you face?

Example objectives:

1. Program policies will be updated within six months to reflect appropriate modeling during mealtimes.  
Staff will eat and drink the same food prepared for the children, meals will be served family-style, staff development on healthy nutrition and role modeling will be offered annually.
2. Staff will receive training on child nutrition and role modeling healthy eating annually.
3. In the next month, a staff team will be created to help develop an action plan.
4. Program director will conduct monthly observations of meal service to determine areas of improvement in family-style meal service.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Vegetables

Vegetables have nutrients such as:

- Folate (support brain development)
- Calcium (supports bone health)
- Fiber (good for digestive health)
- B vitamins (how our bodies get energy from food)

[Tip] Offer vegetables in place of high-calorie snack foods.

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Vegetables

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.

- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - [Vegetables and Fruit Requirements in CACFP: Q&As](#)
      - § 226.20 Requirements for meals
        - (a)(2) Vegetables. A serving may contain fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables, dry beans and peas (legumes), or vegetable juice. All vegetables are credited based on their volume as served, except that 1 cup of leafy greens counts as 1/2 cup of vegetables.
        - (a)(2)(ii) Pasteurized, full-strength vegetable juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Vegetable juice or fruit juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.
        - (3)(ii) A vegetable may be used to meet the entire fruit requirement at lunch and supper. When two vegetables are served at lunch or supper, two different kinds of vegetables must be served.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Vegetables

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Vegetables. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Program policies help guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

#### ➤ Supporting Healthy Meals (+)

Creating a positive eating environment takes time, patience, and planning. Think about ways to build parts of the positive eating environment into your current practices even if your setting does not allow family-style dining. For example, how can staff engage children in positive, give-and-take conversation during mealtime? What policies can support these changes?

Think of ways to:

- Support staff. Sometimes, state licensing requirements have larger staff/child ratios. This can be difficult because mealtimes can be messy, making it hard to serve meals family-style. A policy supporting smaller staff/child ratios is one way to help staff during mealtime [[Center-based care, Head Start](#)]
- Support children. Hopefully you are able to offer family-style dining in your center. However, children, especially toddlers, may need help building skills in self-serving and mealtime behaviors

such as sharing and passing. Think how your policies might support these skills. Are children offered the opportunity to practice pouring or self-serving during pretend play or snack time? Example policy: To create a positive eating environment, staff will receive additional support to reduce the staff/child ratio as often as possible.

➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

Your local community is a great place to find resources to support your staff. There are local agencies that support child nutrition such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), extension office, and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) center. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the Resource section for more.

Example policy: *Staff development will be offered annually regarding healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty such as a registered dietitian.*

➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

➤ Nutrition Education (+)

When considering changes to your menus or food service, it may be helpful to think about the role nutrition education can play. Incorporating healthy foods into weekly or monthly lesson plans can allow children to become more comfortable with new fruits, so they are more willing to try them at meals. A program policy defining nutrition education in your program and how often it should be used in lesson planning can be helpful. Remember, nutrition education is not only about healthy vs. unhealthy foods. [Healthy foods can be used to teach](#) colors, shapes, textures, science (how things grow), math (counting, sorting, and graphing).

Example policy: *The program will incorporate healthy foods into classroom lesson plans at least once a month. Most of the foods will be represented on the month's program menus.*

## Menu Selection

Vegetables offer important nutrients to a child's diet. We know children do not eat enough fruits and vegetables each day; often consuming none. Depending on the community you serve, families in your program might struggle offering vegetables regularly at home or exposing their children to a variety of fruits and vegetables. We



want all children to eat at least [five fruits and vegetables throughout the day](#). Your menus are a pivotal tool to improving children's diets and offering more fruits and vegetables each day.

➤ **Vegetables Are Available Daily (+)**

It might be helpful to consider using vegetables in season and partnering with local farmers and/or community gardens. While fresh is best, frozen or even canned vegetables labeled as reduced sodium or no-salt added can still offer important nutrients while being less expensive than fresh.

Example objectives:

1. We will partner with a registered dietitian to identify opportunities to incorporate vegetables. Our initial goal is one additional vegetable a week with eventual goal of two to three vegetables offered daily.
2. Our program will substitute fresh vegetables for canned vegetables twice a week.
3. Our program will determine opportunities to include vegetables as part of snack (i.e. substitute green pepper slices for graham crackers).

➤ **Vegetable Options Include Fresh, Frozen, and Canned Vegetables Labeled as “Reduced Sodium” or “No-Salt Added” (+)**

Fresh vegetables are best but can be expensive to use exclusively. Using local or seasonal produce can help your program stay within budget. Frozen and/or canned vegetables labeled as reduced sodium or no-salt-added are also acceptable, healthy alternatives to fresh vegetables.

Example objectives:

1. Partner with an RD to determine one opportunity a month to incorporate seasonal vegetables in program menu.
2. In the next month, program staff will create list of local farmers or community gardens.
3. Our program will substitute all offered canned vegetables for reduced sodium or no-salt added canned options.
4. Our program will substitute canned vegetables for frozen or fresh at least once a week.

➤ **Vegetable Options Are Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)**

[Family style meals](#) are important to building a child's ability to listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues, determine serving sizes, and try new foods, etc. It is important vegetable options are available for self-serving during mealtime equally to other foods.

Example objectives:

1. Program director will conduct monthly observations of meal service to determine areas of improvement in family-style meal service.
2. Program cook will offer measuring cups (1/4 cup of vegetables for toddlers; 1/2 cup for preschoolers) as serving utensils.
3. Staff development will be provided annually on family style meals including serving sizes for toddler and preschoolers; [responsive feeding](#); and strategies for successful implementation.
4. All foods will be served in similar size and color bowls for self-serving.

## Program Environment

Your program spends considerable time establishing a safe and engaging [learning environment](#). Your mealtime is also a learning environment. During mealtimes, children learn healthy habits such as trying new foods, listening to their body's signs of hunger and fullness, and table manners.

➤ **All Vegetable Names Are Introduced to the Children Prior to the Meal or Snack (+)**

The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of vegetables. When you make changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can

also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

1. Program staff (assign a responsible person) will post pictures of vegetables around the classroom.
2. Program staff will add lessons monthly on vegetables.
3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new vegetables. Sample activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.

➤ **Vegetable Names Are Written and/or Pictured Near Where Children Eat (+)**

The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of vegetables. When you make changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

1. Pictures and words of vegetables near the eating areas will be posted and updated monthly.
2. Program staff (teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a new food from the program menu at least once a month.
3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new vegetables. Sample activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.

➤ **Providers Role Model to Children How to Serve Themselves and Participate in Family-style Dining (+)**

Adults show examples of how to behave, interact with others, build friendships, and even eat during mealtime. Adults can role model positive mealtime behaviors by eating the same food and using positive language, and avoid bringing in outside food or drink when eating with children.

Engage staff early and often when implementing program changes. Try creating a team with your staff to plan and implement the changes from your action plan. Have staff think about:

1. What changes can they make?
2. What do they need to make this change (i.e. training, resources, support)?
3. What are challenges will you face?

Example objectives:

1. Program policies will be updated within six months to reflect appropriate modeling during mealtimes. Staff will eat and drink the same food prepared for the children, meals will be served family-style, staff development on healthy nutrition and role modeling will be offered annually.
2. In the next month, a staff team will be created to help develop an action plan.
3. Staff will receive training on child nutrition and role modeling healthy eating annually.
4. Program director will conduct monthly observations of meal service to determine areas of improvement in family-style meal service.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Beverages

Right on track! Beverages such as water and low-fat milk are part of a healthy diet.

[Tip] It's okay to offer 100 percent juice to preschoolers in small amounts. They can drink up to 4-6 oz. of 100 percent juice a day, either at home or in the program.

Infants should not be offered any juice. Sugary drinks cause infants and toddlers to prefer sweet, sugary flavors. For infants, sugary drinks:

- Make them less likely to drink water
- Increases their risk for tooth decay and excess weight

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Beverages

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
    - 4.2.06 Availability of Drinking Water
    - 4.2.07 100 Percent Fruit Juice
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44 (a)(2)(ix)
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for meals
      - (1) Fluid milk. Fluid milk must be served as a beverage or on cereal, or a combination of both, as follows:
        - (i) Children 1 year old. Children one year of age must be served unflavored whole milk.
        - (ii) Children 2 through 5 years old. Children two through five years old must be served either unflavored low-fat (1 percent) or unflavored fat-free (skim) milk.
      - (2)(i) Pasteurized, full-strength vegetable juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Vegetable juice or fruit juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.
        - (i) Pasteurized, full-strength fruit juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Fruit juice or vegetable juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.
        - (ii) A vegetable may be used to meet the entire fruit requirement at lunch and supper. When two vegetables are served at lunch or supper, two different kinds of vegetables must be served.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Beverages

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Beverages. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Program policies help guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

#### ➤ Supporting Healthy Meals (+)

Creating a positive eating environment takes time, patience, and planning. Think about ways to build parts of the positive eating environment into your current practices even if your setting does not allow family-style dining. For example, how can staff engage children in positive, give-and-take conversation during mealtime? What policies can support these changes?

Think of ways to:

- Support staff. Sometimes, state licensing requirements have larger staff/child ratios. This can be difficult because mealtimes can be messy, making it hard to serve meals family-style. A policy supporting smaller staff/child ratios is one way to help staff during mealtime [[Center-based care, Head Start](#)]
- Support children. Hopefully you are able to offer family-style dining in your center. However, children, especially toddlers, may need help building skills in self-serving and mealtime behaviors such as sharing and passing. Think how your policies might support these skills. Are children offered the opportunity to practice pouring or self-serving during pretend play or snack time? Example policy: To create a positive eating environment, staff will receive additional support to reduce the staff/child ratio as often as possible.

#### ➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

Your local community is a great place to find resources to support your staff. There are local agencies that support child nutrition such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), extension office, and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) center. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the Resource section for more.

Example policy: *Staff will receive training on child nutrition annually regarding healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty such as a registered dietitian.*

#### ➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities

for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

➤ Nutrition Education (+)

When considering changes to your menus or food service, it may be helpful to think about the role nutrition education can play. Incorporating healthy foods into weekly or monthly lesson plans can allow children to become more comfortable with new fruits, so they are more willing to try them at meals. A program policy defining nutrition education in your program and how often it should be used in lesson planning can be helpful. Remember, nutrition education is not only about healthy vs. unhealthy foods. Healthy beverages can be used to teach new words, colors, math (spatial awareness, measuring) and fine motor skills.

Example policy: *The program will incorporate healthy foods into classroom lesson plans at least once a month. Most of the foods will be represented on the month's program menus.*

## Menu Selection

Healthy drinks such as low-fat milk and water are important to a child's diet and healthy growth. Low-fat milk offers calcium and Vitamin D, important nutrients for building strong bones and healthy growth. Water hydrates for play, [protects against cavities](#) by reducing acid in the mouth, and helps maintain a healthy weight. Your program can support healthy beverage choices through menu planning.

➤ Fat-free or 1 Percent Milk Is Provided for Children (+)

Children older than 2 years of age, should be offered fat-free or 1 percent milk. Children 1-2 years of age should be offered whole milk. Offering milk at lunch and/or snack time can help children get the nutrients they need.

Example objectives:

- Our program will substitute juice for low-fat milk during snack twice a week.
- Our program will offer 1 percent or fat-free milk during lunch.
- Our program will switch from 2 percent or whole milk to 1 percent or fat-free milk for children older than two years.

➤ Milk Is Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)

[Family style meals](#) are important to building a child's ability to listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues, determine servings sizes, and try new foods, etc. Make mealtime an opportunity to offer children healthy beverages and practice serving themselves.

Make low-fat milk and water available during meals. Offer beverages in small, clear pitchers that are partially full. Have staff available to assist children as needed.

Example objectives:

1. In the next three months, 1 percent or fat-free milk will be offered during meals in child-size pitchers. Children will be encouraged to serve themselves with staff assistance as needed.
  2. Within three months, our program policy will be updated to include family-style meal service with strategies for serving beverages.
  3. Staff will receive training on healthy beverages and family style meals annually.
- If Juice Is Served, It Is 100 Percent Fruit or Vegetable Juice (+)
- Juice, even 100 percent fruit juice, has excess sugar and calories in a child's diet while offering limited nutrients. Juice should not be served to infants and should be [limited](#) with toddlers and preschoolers. To help limit the amount of juice children drink, offer only low-fat milk or water in your program. If you do

offer juice, 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice is best. Fruit drinks, sodas, and punches are not appropriate for young children.

Example objectives:

1. In the next six months, program menus will be updated to only offer 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice.
2. Program menus will offer only 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice, once a week.
3. In the next six months, only fat-free or 1 percent milk and water will be offered at meals and snacks.

## Program Environment

Your program can support healthy nutrition beyond mealtimes and menu planning. Consider how you might encourage healthy drinks throughout the program day. Is water available for children to serve themselves throughout the day? Are images of healthy foods and drinks posted throughout the classroom? Do you offer books on healthy foods and drinks?

### ➤ Drinking Water is Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)

Water keeps children hydrated for play, protects against cavities, and helps maintain a healthy weight. Water should be available and accessible to children for self-serving throughout the day. This teaches children to monitor their own thirst, and water is a healthy drink choice. Find ideas in the CDC's [Increasing Access to Drinking Water and Other Healthier Beverages in Early Care and Education Settings](#) for ways to increase water in your program.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, water will be made accessible to children for self-serving.
2. In the next three months, program staff will name opportunities to make water available throughout the day.
3. In the next six months, the program will use the CDC resource, *Increasing Access to Drinking Water and Other Healthier Beverages in Early Care and Education Settings*, to find ways to make water available in the program.

### ➤ All Beverage Names Are Introduced to Children Prior to the Meal or Snack (+)

Healthy beverages are part of a healthy diet. Introducing beverages to children helps them learn and become familiar with healthy beverages. Encourage children to try new beverages through fun learning experiences, such as teach new words, colors, math (spatial awareness, measuring), and fine motor skills.

Example objectives:

- In the next month, healthy beverages will be introduced to children. Pictures and names of beverages from the menu will be posted in the eating area.
- Within three months, program staff (i.e. teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a healthy drink as part of a lesson plan.
- In the next six months, families will be encouraged to serve healthy beverages at home. Family activities and education will be provided to families.

### ➤ Beverages Are Written and Pictured Near Where Children Eat (+)

Healthy beverages are part of a healthy diet. Introducing beverages to children helps them learn and become familiar with healthy beverages. Pictures allow a child to learn and explore healthy beverages and meals. Pictures can encourage children to try a new drink. Encourage children to try new beverages through fun learning experiences, such as teaching new words, colors, math (spatial awareness, measuring), and motor skills (pouring).

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, pictures and names of beverages from the menu will be posted in the eating area.

2. Within three months, program staff (i.e. teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a healthy drink as part of a lesson plan.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to serve healthy beverages at home. Family activities and education will be provided to families.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Meal Planning

Great choice! Providing healthy foods help children grow and learn. The foods your program serves support:

- Life-long eating habits
- Healthy weight and growth
- Nutrition needed to learn
- Variety of fruits and vegetables in a child's diet

[Tip] Think of small steps that children, staff, and families are more likely to accept and keep, such as healthier version of current favorites.

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Meal Planning

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Nutrition service requirements, 45 CFR § 1302.44 (a)
    - Child health status and care, 45 CFR § 1302.42(4)
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR §1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for meals

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Meal Planning

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Meal Planning. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Program policies help guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

#### ➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

Your local community is a great place to find resources to support your staff. There are local agencies that support child nutrition such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), extension office, and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) center. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the Resource section for more.

Example policy: *Staff development will be offered annually regarding healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty such as a registered dietitian.*

#### ➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

#### ➤ Culturally Diverse Foods (+)

Culture refers to the "traditions, rituals, beliefs, and values that are shared among a group of people."

Explore different cultures to create opportunities for children to learn about common traits, customs and traditions. It is also an opportunity to teach self-esteem, acceptance and diversity. Offer diverse foods on your menus from different cultures as another teaching opportunity for children. [Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five](#) has additional ideas to increase diversity in your program.

A community assessment (conducted in Head Start programs or at your local health department) can identify different cultures represented in your community. Build staff development opportunities so staff are knowledgeable and comfortable discussing different cultures. It can also be helpful to reach out to communities of different cultures (i.e. faith leaders, immigrant advocates) to support staff, children and families.



Example policy: *Our program is dedicated to making all children feel welcome and represented. As part of this effort, our menus will offer culturally diverse foods. Staff will be trained in cultural diversity bi-annually and upon orientation. The program will work with community leaders for additional support.*

## Menu Selection

- The Menu Includes a Variety of Foods Which Consider Cultural and Ethnic Preferences (+)  
Offer foods on your menu from different cultures as an opportunity to explore and welcome all children. Including culturally diverse foods can build self-awareness and self-esteem and teach acceptance and diversity.  
Partnering registered dietitians, health care consultants, and TA specialists with community leaders can identify opportunities to incorporate healthy culturally diverse foods into your program. A family nutrition assessment during enrollment can also inform your menus. Talking with families during enrollment will help you learn their cultural needs and identify ways to support the children in your program.  
Example questions: *Tell me about mealtime in your home? What types of foods do you normally serve? What is your child/family's favorite food? Are there any foods that you do not want your child to eat?*  
Example objectives:
  1. In the next month, our program will review and update our nutrition assessment/enrollment process to identify cultural and ethnic food preferences.
  2. In the next three months, our program will partner with community leaders, families and/or a registered dietitian to identify opportunities to offer healthy foods from different cultures.
  3. In the next year, our program will offer staff development on various cultures represented in our community. Community leaders will be engaged to support the program as often as possible.
  
- Menu is Modified for Children with Food Allergies/Intolerances and Children With Disabilities (+)  
The most common food allergens include peanut, milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, and wheat. Depending on the allergen, it may be difficult to remove the food entirely from your menu. Accommodating a child's severe sensitivity may require removing all possible exposure in the program and on the menu and supporting families. A registered dietitian, child care health consultant, or health care professional such as a nurse can help you identify the appropriate approach and strategies.  
Once you are aware of a diagnosed food allergy:
  - Menus are reviewed and modified as needed,
  - Activities outside of mealtime, such as sensory play, food experiences, outdoor gross motor time, are identified and adapted,
  - An [emergency action plan](#) is created with the family,
  - Staff are trained on food allergies including symptoms and medication administration.Example objectives:
  1. In one month, our program will develop a policy on how we will address food allergies including menu changes.
  2. As soon as a child is identified, our program will work with a medical professional (RD, RN) to identify possible menu changes to accommodate known (diagnosed) or common food allergens.
  3. Staff will receive training on food allergies and medication administration including epinephrine administration annually.

## Program Environment

Mealtimes should be a safe and engaging learning environment for children to learn healthy habits, such as trying new foods, listening to their body's signs of hunger and fullness, and table manners.

The healthy changes you are trying to make in your program are also opportunities to teach children about

nutrition. In addition to changes on your menu, consider how your program might support nutrition in the classroom. Communicate with staff and families to create a positive eating environment.

➤ **Menu Board Featuring Daily Meals and Snacks Are Available and Visible Near (e.g., Classroom or Dining Space) (+)**

Your mealtime can also be a learning environment. Staff can use menu boards to introduce new foods before mealtime. This allows young children to learn about the foods they are eating. Allow children to touch, smell, and talk about foods that may be new to them. Menu boards can also show healthy foods, the mealtime routine, and eating environment.

Example objectives:

1. Staff will update the menu boards monthly with pictures of foods on the menu.
2. Staff will offer learning experiences related to the foods on the menu monthly.
3. In the next six months, the program will offer activities and education for families about the program menu and learning goals. For example, family activities that focus on recognizing letters.

➤ **A Monthly Menu Is Provided to All Families and Staff (+)**

Families appreciate knowing what foods their child will be served throughout the day. Providing families with menus monthly is an opportunity to discuss healthy changes to your menu, the eating environment such as [family style meals](#), and ways they can support these efforts at home. You can:

- Encourage feedback on program menus or healthier menu options.
- Ask families for menu suggestions and send recipes of healthier versions home.
- Ask families to offer foods new to your menu at home to support picky eaters.
- Offer recipes of their child's favorite dishes.

Example objectives:

1. Program menus will be sent home monthly.
2. In the next three months, families will be engaged to offer menu suggestions such as their child's or family's favorite meal.
3. Families will receive healthy recipes, snack ideas, and activities monthly to support the program's menu.

➤ **A Monthly Nutrition and/or Physical Activity Message Is Included on the Monthly Menu (+)**

Families are interested in hearing how their child is eating or what foods they enjoy throughout the day. Your program menus can be great family engagement tools. Consider ways you can offer healthy activities as part of your monthly menu communication. Don't forget to include activities that help families move together. Regular activity in daily life is important to build long term movement habits. You could:

- Offer healthy recipes for meals and snacks
- Provide healthier recipes for family favorites
- Offer healthy nutrition information aligned to a food on your menu such as red peppers and Vitamin C
- Provide messaging aligned with a nutrition education framework such as [5,2,1,0](#).

Example objectives:

1. Program menus will be sent home with families monthly with related healthy, active living activities.
2. In the next month, staff will identify and determine possible 5,2,1,0 messaging to align with menus.
3. In the next six months, families will be engaged to determine what nutrition and physical activity messaging and/or supports they would like to learn about most.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time

Good! Mealtime can show children positive eating behaviors.

[Tip] Eating meals family-style support child development.

- Children learn new words during conversation with peers and staff.
- Children take turns to share food and drinks.
- Staff model good habits.

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child Nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44 (a)
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)(2)
    - Family support services for health, nutrition, and mental health, 45 CFR § 1302.46
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for Meal Service
      - (n) Family-style meal service. Family-style is a type of meal service, which allows children and adults to serve themselves from common platters of food with the assistance of supervising adults. Institutions and facilities choosing to exercise this option must be in compliance with the following practices:
        - (1) A sufficient amount of prepared food must be placed on each table to provide the full required portions of each of the components, as outlined in paragraphs (c)(1) and (2) of this section, for all children or adults at the table and to accommodate supervising adults if they wish to eat with the children and adults.
        - (2) Children and adults must be allowed to serve the food components themselves, with the exception of fluids (such as milk). During the course of the meal, it is the responsibility of the supervising adults to actively encourage each child and adult to serve themselves the full required portion of each food component of the meal pattern. Supervising adults who choose to serve the fluids directly to the children or adults must serve the required minimum quantity to each child or adult.

(k) Time of meal service. State agencies may require any institution or facility to allow a specific amount of time to elapse between meal services or require that meal services not exceed a specified duration.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Meal Planning

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

- **Mealtime Takes Place at a Regularly Scheduled Time and as Part of Children's Daily Routine (+)**  
Offering meals at the same time can support behavior, attention, and learning throughout the day. If children know the routine and schedule, they engage and participate more in your classroom. In addition to offering your meals at regularly scheduled times, consider:
  - Discussing and reviewing a daily schedule with visual cues children can revisit throughout the day.
  - Building consistent routines before and after mealtimes. For example, before meals children may sing a song, wash their hands, and set the table.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, our program will revise the mealtime policy to establish regularly scheduled meals and snacks. This will be done in collaboration with our cooks and teachers.
2. In the next three months, our program will educate families on the importance of mealtime routines at home.

- **Adults Caring for Children (e.g., Teachers, Assistants, Etc.) Have Been Trained and Model Appropriate Mealtime Behavior (+)**

Adults caring for children play an important role in eating healthy foods and mealtime behavior. Provide training to staff to help them learn about [responsive feeding](#), and mealtime behaviors to practice in their classroom.

As you work with staff review their current practices. Do staff:

- Sit and eat the same foods as the children?
- Support picky eaters? Remember a child may need to be offered a food 10-15 times before they will try it.
- Refrain from using negative comments such as "I don't like carrots" or "Eat all your broccoli before you can have strawberries"?
- Support children listening to their hunger cues, using comments such as "How does your tummy feel?"
- Allow children to have seconds once everyone has a serving?

Example objectives:

1. In the next three months, staff will be observed during mealtime to identify possible needs for support and training.
2. Staff will be offered training annually on mealtime behaviors, [responsive feeding](#), and supporting healthy eaters.
3. In the next six months, activities will be offered for families to practice modeling healthy behaviors at home.

- **Adults Caring for Children Turn Off All Visible Screens Including; Televisions, Tablets, Phones, Etc. During Mealtime and Engage in Conversation With the Children (+)**

Watching television, reading tablets, checking phones, etc. during mealtime limits engagement opportunities with the children. Eating while watching screen time, can lead to overeating or ignoring hunger cues. Provide different opportunities for staff to check messages or use screens.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, the program's policy will be revised to prohibit staff from using screen time during meals. Staff will be offered different opportunities throughout the day to check messages.
2. In the next three months, families will be encouraged to reduce or limit screen time during meals. Activities or strategies will be offered to engage their child in conversation related to classroom activities.

## Menu Selection

### ➤ Enough Time During Meals (+)

Children should be offered plenty of time to eat and serve themselves. Hopefully, your program is able to offer at least 45 minutes for breakfast or lunch and 30 minutes for snack. It might be helpful to review how much time your program currently provides, observe how much time is actually offered, and ask if staff feel this time is adequate and manageable.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, our program's mealtime policy will be revised to include appropriate length of time for meals and snacks.
2. In the next three months, classroom staff will be asked to identify challenges regarding the length of meals and snacks. Staff will be asked to identify possible solutions.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to offer appropriate meal and snack times at home to support changes in the classroom.

### ➤ Staff Engagement in Menu Changes (+)

Offering healthier options on your program menus can introduce new foods not only to children in your program but staff as well. This is an opportunity to get input from staff regarding their food habits and perception of healthy foods. It is important to talk about staff's views when implementing an initiative since they are responsible for implementing changes. Ask staff for menu suggestions or favorites the cook can incorporate in healthier ways.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, staff will be asked for suggestions to incorporate healthier options on the menu by either the cook, health staff, or registered dietitian.
2. In the next three months, a team of classroom staff, program director, and any health-related staff (such as health manager, cook, dietitian) will identify possible healthier menu options.

## Program Environment

### ➤ Adults Caring for Children Sit With Children at the Table During Mealtime (+)

Caregivers play an important role in establishing a positive eating environment. Children look for adults to learn about trying new foods, appropriate serving sizes, and table manners. Staff may benefit from training to support picky eaters; understand serving sizes for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; and support children during meals. It is also important to support staff by offering breaks during times of the day other than child mealtimes.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, the program policy will be revised to require staff to sit with children at the table during mealtime. Support from other program staff will be offered as often as possible.

2. In the next three months, the mealtime environment will be observed to determine if program staff are sitting with the children and engaged in a positive, supportive way.
3. Staff will receive training annually on engaging children in positive eating environment, serving sizes, and supporting healthy eaters.

➤ **Adults Caring** for Children Discuss if Children's Stomachs Feel Full Before Serving a Second Helping of Food (+)

Encourage children to listen to their body's hunger cues and satiety (or fullness). Adults caring for children can help them recognize their hunger cues by offering opportunities during mealtime to evaluate their feelings of hunger and satiety.

Staff can:

1. Ask before mealtime begins, "How does your tummy feel?" and then again after most have finished their first serving.
2. Staff can ask during meal and snack time, "How does your tummy feel? Does it feel empty or full?"
3. At the end of mealtime ask again, "How does your tummy feel now?"

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, the program director will observe mealtimes to identify areas of support and training
2. Staff training will be offered annually to support staff in [responsive feeding](#).

➤ During Mealtime Staff Encourage Children to Try New or Less Preferred Foods (+)

As a caregiver, you play an important role to encourage healthy habits in young children. During mealtime, encourage children to try new foods by trying them yourself, sitting less picky eaters next to picky eaters, offering an opportunity to explore new foods before children are served during mealtime, such as throughout the day.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, mealtime observations will be used to measure how staff are encouraging children to try new foods.
2. In the next three months, classroom staff will use nutrition education to introduce new or less preferred foods to children.
3. Staff will receive training annually on role modeling and supporting healthy eaters.

➤ A Transition Activity Is Offered to Children When They're Done With Their Meal (+)

Transitions are powerful tools to successful mealtimes and a positive eating environment. It establishes a standard routine children rely upon to know when mealtime is completed. It also allows staff to offer activities until all children finish their meal. This can support mealtime behaviors and reduce pressure on staff to end mealtime early to monitor all children.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, teachers will create transition activities for mealtimes. Staff will choose a transition activity to fit their classroom.
2. In the next three months, program staff will identify opportunities for additional support during mealtime transitions.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to create family routines for mealtimes. Activities and suggestions will be offered for families to try at home.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Family child care

### Choose A Goal

Look at the results from your Positive Eating Environment Self-Assessment. Choose one area from the Self-Assessment to work on in your program.

[Tip] Start with the most challenging section. This is probably a section where you often checked “Never” and/or “Ready to Get Started.”

I want to start with: -- Choose – [Dropdown Box]

Dropdown Box Text:

Fruits

Vegetables

Beverages

Meal Planning

Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time

### Fruits

Great choice! Offering fruits regularly during meals and snacks can build healthy strong eating habits and get children ready to learn!

Fruits have nutrients such as:

- Vitamin A (supports vision; helps stop infections)
- Vitamin C (good for teeth and gums)
- Fiber (good for digestive health)

[Tip] Be careful of extra sugar in fruit juice or canned fruits. Sugar can cause dental problems and excess weight. Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

### Standards For Fruits

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today’s early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
    - 4.7.0.1 Nutrition Learning Experiences for Children
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

- 226.20 Requirements for meals
  - (3) Fruits. A serving may contain fresh, frozen, canned, dried fruits, or fruit juice. All fruits are based on their volume as served, except that  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of dried fruit counts as  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruit
    - (i) Pasteurized, full-strength fruit juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Fruit juice or vegetable juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Fruits

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Fruits. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Policies guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

#### ➤ Supporting Healthy Meals (+)

Creating a positive eating environment takes time, patience, and planning. Think about ways to build parts of the positive eating environment into your current practices even if your setting does not allow family-style dining. For example, how can staff engage children in positive, give-and-take conversation during mealtime? What policies can support these changes?

Think of ways to:

- Support staff. Sometimes, state licensing requirements have larger staff/child ratios. This can be difficult because mealtimes can be messy, making it hard to serve meals family-style. A policy supporting smaller staff/child ratios is one way to help staff during mealtime [[Family child care, Head Start](#)]
- Support children. Hopefully you are able to offer family-style dining in your center. However, children, especially toddlers, may need help building skills in self-serving and mealtime behaviors such as sharing and passing. Think how your policies might support these skills. Are children offered the opportunity to practice pouring or self-serving during pretend play or snack time?

#### ➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Many adults struggle with their own eating habits and what foods they view as healthy or tasty. A good place to start might be to ask staff their views of program menus and healthier foods. Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

If you do not have a contracted Registered Dietitian (RD), look to your local community. Agencies that support child nutrition include Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program



(CACFP), the extension office, and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) centers. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the resource section for more information.

Example policy: *Annually, staff will be offered training in healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty, such as a registered dietitian.*

➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

➤ Nutrition Education (+)

When considering changes to your menus or food service, it may be helpful to think about the role nutrition education can play. Incorporating healthy foods into weekly or monthly lesson plans can allow children to become more comfortable with new fruits, so they are more willing to try them at meals. A program policy defining nutrition education in your program and how often it should be used in lesson planning can be helpful. Remember, nutrition education is not only about healthy vs. unhealthy foods. [Healthy foods can be used to teach](#) colors, shapes, textures, science (how things grow), math (counting, sorting, and graphing).

Example policy: *The program will incorporate healthy foods into classroom lesson plans at least once a month. All effort will be made to use foods represented on the month's program menus.*

## Menu Selection

Having nutritious menus are important to improving children's health. Serving fruit in your program is a great way for children to get the nutrients they need. Try increasing the amount of fruits you serve daily, and work with families to try new fruits at home. Remember, we want children to eat at least [five fruits and vegetables](#) throughout the day, both at home and in your program.

➤ Fruit Is Available Daily (+)

Increase the amount of fruit you serve in your program. You can do this by offering a different fruit at every meal. It might be helpful to consider using fruits in season and partnering with local farmers and/or community gardens. While fresh is best, frozen or even canned fruit packed in water or 100 percent juice (not syrup) still offer important nutrients while being less expensive than fresh.

Example objectives:

- We will add one additional fruit daily to our menu.
- Our program will substitute fruit for 100 percent juice twice a week.
- Our program will offer fruit during snack time; for example, substitute apple slices for graham crackers.

➤ Fruit Options Include Fresh, Frozen, and Canned Fruit Packed in Water or 100 Percent Juice (Not Packed in Light or Heavy Syrup) (+)

Fresh fruit is best but can be expensive. Using local or seasonal produce can help your program offer fresh produce while staying within budget. Frozen and/or canned fruit packed in water or 100 percent juice (not syrup) are also acceptable, healthy alternatives to fresh fruit.

Example objectives:

- In the next six months, our program will substitute all fruit canned in syrup with fruit canned in water.
  - Our program will serve one seasonal fruit monthly.
  - Our program will serve one fresh fruit weekly.
- Fruit Options Are Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)
- [Family style meals](#) are important to building a child's ability to listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues, determine serving sizes, and try new foods. Make mealtime an opportunity for children to try new fruits and practice serving themselves.

Example objectives:

1. Measuring cups will be used as serving utensils (1/4 cup of fruit for toddlers; 1/2 cup for preschoolers).
2. Staff will receive annual training on family-style dining.
3. Child-size equipment such as utensils, bowls, cups, and pitchers will be used during meals.
4. In the next month, fruits will be served at the same time and with the same presentation even if served as "dessert."
5. The program director will conduct monthly observations of mealtimes to find areas of improvement in family-style meal service.

## Program Environment

Your program spends considerable time establishing a safe and engaging [learning environment](#). Your mealtime is also a learning environment. During mealtimes, children learn healthy habits such as trying new foods, listening to their body's signs of hunger and fullness, and table manners.

- All Fruit Names Are Introduced to the Children Prior to the Meal or Snack (+)
- The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of fruits. When you make additions or changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

1. Program staff (assign a responsible person) will post pictures of fruits from the menus monthly around the classroom.
2. One lesson plan a month will use fruits from that month's menu.
3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new fruits. Family activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.

- Fruit Names Are Written and/or Pictured Near Where Children Eat (+)
- The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of fruits. When you make additions or changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

1. Pictures and words of fruits near the eating areas will be posted and updated monthly.
2. Program staff (i.e. teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a new food from the program menu at least once a month.

3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new fruits. Family activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.

- Providers Role Model to Children How to Serve Themselves and Participate in Family-style Dining (+) Adults show examples of how to behave, interact with others, build friendships, and even eat during mealtime. Adults can role model positive mealtime behaviors by eating the same food, using positive language, and avoid bringing in outside food or drink when eating with children.

Engage staff early and often when implementing program changes. Try creating a team with your staff to plan and implement the changes from your action plan. Have staff think about:

1. What changes can they make?
2. What do they need to make this change (i.e. training, resources, support)?
3. What are challenges will you face?

Example objectives:

1. Program policies will be updated within six months to reflect appropriate modeling during mealtimes. Staff will eat and drink the same food prepared for the children, meals will be served family-style, staff development on healthy nutrition and role modeling will be offered annually.
2. Staff will receive training on child nutrition and role modeling healthy eating annually.
3. In the next month, a staff team will be created to help develop an action plan.
4. Program director will conduct monthly observations of meal service to determine areas of improvement in family-style meal service.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Vegetables

Vegetables have nutrients such as:

- Folate (support brain development)
- Calcium (supports bone health)
- Fiber (good for digestive health)
- B vitamins (how our bodies get energy from food)

[Tip] Offer vegetables in place of high-calorie snack foods.

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Vegetables

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.

- Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
  - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
  - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
  - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
  - Child nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44
  - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
- Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
  - [Vegetables and Fruit Requirements in CACFP: Q&As](#)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for meals
      - (a)(2) Vegetables. A serving may contain fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables, dry beans and peas (legumes), or vegetable juice. All vegetables are credited based on their volume as served, except that 1 cup of leafy greens counts as 1/2 cup of vegetables.
      - (a)(2)(ii) Pasteurized, full-strength vegetable juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Vegetable juice or fruit juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.
      - (3)(ii) A vegetable may be used to meet the entire fruit requirement at lunch and supper. When two vegetables are served at lunch or supper, two different kinds of vegetables must be served.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Vegetables

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Vegetables. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Program policies help guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

- Supporting Healthy Meals (+)
 

Creating a positive eating environment takes time, patience, and planning. Think about ways to build parts of the positive eating environment into your current practices even if your setting does not allow family-style dining. For example, how can staff engage children in positive, give-and-take conversation during mealtime? What policies can support these changes?

Think of ways to:

  - Support staff. Sometimes, state licensing requirements have larger staff/child ratios. This can be difficult because mealtimes can be messy, making it hard to serve meals family-style. A policy supporting smaller staff/child ratios is one way to help staff during mealtime [[Center-based care, Head Start](#)]
  - Support children. Hopefully you are able to offer family-style dining in your center. However, children, especially toddlers, may need help building skills in self-serving and mealtime behaviors such as sharing and passing. Think how your policies might support these skills. Are children offered the opportunity to practice pouring or self-serving during pretend play or snack time? Example policy: To create a positive eating environment, staff will receive additional support to reduce the staff/child ratio as often as possible.
- Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

Your local community is a great place to find resources to support your staff. There are local agencies that support child nutrition such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), extension office, and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) center. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the Resource section for more.

Example policy: *Staff development will be offered annually regarding healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty such as a registered dietitian.*

➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

➤ Nutrition Education (+)

When considering changes to your menus or food service, it may be helpful to think about the role nutrition education can play. Incorporating healthy foods into weekly or monthly lesson plans can allow children to become more comfortable with new fruits, so they are more willing to try them at meals. A program policy defining nutrition education in your program and how often it should be used in lesson planning can be helpful. Remember, nutrition education is not only about healthy vs. unhealthy foods. [Healthy foods can be used to teach](#) colors, shapes, textures, science (how things grow), math (counting, sorting, and graphing).

Example policy: *The program will incorporate healthy foods into classroom lesson plans at least once a month. Most of the foods will be represented on the month's program menus.*

## Menu Selection

Vegetables offer important nutrients to a child's diet. We know children do not eat enough fruits and vegetables each day; often consuming none. Depending on the community you serve, families in your program might struggle offering vegetables regularly at home or exposing their children to a variety of fruits and vegetables. We want all children to eat at least [five fruits and vegetables throughout the day](#). Your menus are a pivotal tool to improving children's diets and offering more fruits and vegetables each day.

➤ Vegetables Are Available Daily (+)

It might be helpful to consider using vegetables in season and partnering with local farmers and/or community gardens. While fresh is best, frozen or even canned vegetables labeled as reduced sodium or no-salt added can still offer important nutrients while being less expensive than fresh.

Example objectives:

1. We will partner with a registered dietitian to identify opportunities to incorporate vegetables. Our initial goal is one additional vegetable a week with eventual goal of two to three vegetables offered daily.
  2. Our program will substitute fresh vegetables for canned vegetables twice a week.
  3. Our program will determine opportunities to include vegetables as part of snack (i.e. substitute green pepper slices for graham crackers).
- Vegetable Options Include Fresh, Frozen, and Canned Vegetables Labeled as “Reduced Sodium” or “No-Salt Added” (+)
- Fresh vegetables are best but can be expensive to use exclusively. Using local or seasonal produce can help your program stay within budget. Frozen and/or canned vegetables labeled as reduced sodium or no-salt-added are also acceptable, healthy alternatives to fresh vegetables.
- Example objectives:
1. Partner with an RD to determine one opportunity a month to incorporate seasonal vegetables in program menu.
  2. In the next month, program staff will create list of local farmers or community gardens.
  3. Our program will substitute all offered canned vegetables for reduced sodium or no-salt added canned options.
  4. Our program will substitute canned vegetables for frozen or fresh at least once a week.

- Vegetable Options Are Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)
- [Family style meals](#) are important to building a child's ability to listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues, determine servings sizes, and try new foods, etc. It is important vegetable options are available for self-serving during mealtime equally to other foods.
- Example objectives:
1. Program director will conduct monthly observations of meal service to determine areas of improvement in family-style meal service.
  2. Program cook will offer measuring cups (1/4 cup of vegetables for toddlers; 1/2 cup for preschoolers) as serving utensils.
  3. Staff development will be provided annually on family style meals including serving sizes for toddler and preschoolers; [responsive feeding](#); and strategies for successful implementation.
  4. All foods will be served in similar size and color bowls for self-serving.

## Program Environment

Your program spends considerable time establishing a safe and engaging [learning environment](#). Your mealtime is also a learning environment. During mealtimes, children learn healthy habits such as trying new foods, listening to their body's signs of hunger and fullness, and table manners.

- All Vegetable Names Are Introduced to the Children Prior to the Meal or Snack (+)
- The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of vegetables. When you make changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.
- Example objectives:
1. Program staff (assign a responsible person) will post pictures of vegetables around the classroom.
  2. Program staff will add lessons monthly on vegetables.
  3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new vegetables. Sample activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.

➤ **Vegetable Names Are Written and/or Pictured Near Where Children Eat (+)**

The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of vegetables. When you make changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

1. Pictures and words of vegetables near the eating areas will be posted and updated monthly.
2. Program staff (teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a new food from the program menu at least once a month.
3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new vegetables. Sample activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.

➤ **Providers Role Model to Children How to Serve Themselves and Participate in Family-style Dining (+)**

Adults show examples of how to behave, interact with others, build friendships, and even eat during mealtime. Adults can role model positive mealtime behaviors by eating the same food and using positive language, and avoid bringing in outside food or drink when eating with children.

Engage staff early and often when implementing program changes. Try creating a team with your staff to plan and implement the changes from your action plan. Have staff think about:

1. What changes can they make?
2. What do they need to make this change (i.e. training, resources, support)?
3. What are challenges will you face?

Example objectives:

1. Program policies will be updated within six months to reflect appropriate modeling during mealtimes. Staff will eat and drink the same food prepared for the children, meals will be served family-style, staff development on healthy nutrition and role modeling will be offered annually.
2. In the next month, a staff team will be created to help develop an action plan.
3. Staff will receive training on child nutrition and role modeling healthy eating annually.
4. Program director will conduct monthly observations of meal service to determine areas of improvement in family-style meal service.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Beverages

Right on track! Beverages such as water and low-fat milk are part of a healthy diet.

[Tip] It's okay to offer 100 percent juice to preschoolers in small amounts. They can drink up to 4-6 oz. of 100 percent juice a day, either at home or in the program.

Infants should not be offered any juice. Sugary drinks cause infants and toddlers to prefer sweet, sugary flavors.

For infants, sugary drinks:

- Make them less likely to drink water
- Increases their risk for tooth decay and excess weight

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Beverages

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
    - 4.2.06 Availability of Drinking Water
    - 4.2.07 100 Percent Fruit Juice
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44 (a)(2)(ix)
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR §1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for meals
      - (1) Fluid milk. Fluid milk must be served as a beverage or on cereal, or a combination of both, as follows:
        - (i) Children 1 year old. Children one year of age must be served unflavored whole milk.
        - (ii) Children 2 through 5 years old. Children two through five years old must be served either unflavored low-fat (1 percent) or unflavored fat-free (skim) milk.
      - (2)(i) Pasteurized, full-strength vegetable juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Vegetable juice or fruit juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.
        - (i) Pasteurized, full-strength fruit juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Fruit juice or vegetable juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.
        - (ii) A vegetable may be used to meet the entire fruit requirement at lunch and supper. When two vegetables are served at lunch or supper, two different kinds of vegetables must be served.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Beverages

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Beverages. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Program policies help guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

- Supporting Healthy Meals (+)



Creating a positive eating environment takes time, patience, and planning. Think about ways to build parts of the positive eating environment into your current practices even if your setting does not allow family-style dining. For example, how can staff engage children in positive, give-and-take conversation during mealtime? What policies can support these changes?

Think of ways to:

- Support staff. Sometimes, state licensing requirements have larger staff/child ratios. This can be difficult because mealtimes can be messy, making it hard to serve meals family-style. A policy supporting smaller staff/child ratios is one way to help staff during mealtime [[Center-based care, Head Start](#)]
- Support children. Hopefully you are able to offer family-style dining in your center. However, children, especially toddlers, may need help building skills in self-serving and mealtime behaviors such as sharing and passing. Think how your policies might support these skills. Are children offered the opportunity to practice pouring or self-serving during pretend play or snack time? Example policy: To create a positive eating environment, staff will receive additional support to reduce the staff/child ratio as often as possible.

#### ➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

Your local community is a great place to find resources to support your staff. There are local agencies that support child nutrition such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), extension office, and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) center. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the Resource section for more.

Example policy: *Staff will receive training on child nutrition annually regarding healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty such as a registered dietitian.*

#### ➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

#### ➤ Nutrition Education (+)

When considering changes to your menus or food service, it may be helpful to think about the role nutrition education can play. Incorporating healthy foods into weekly or monthly lesson plans can allow children to become more comfortable with new fruits, so they are more willing to try them at meals. A program policy defining nutrition education in your program and how often it should be used in lesson

planning can be helpful. Remember, nutrition education is not only about healthy vs. unhealthy foods. Healthy beverages can be used to teach new words, colors, math (spatial awareness, measuring) and fine motor skills.

Example policy: *The program will incorporate healthy foods into classroom lesson plans at least once a month. Most of the foods will be represented on the month's program menus.*

## Menu Selection

Healthy drinks such as low-fat milk and water are important to a child's diet and healthy growth. Low-fat milk offers calcium and Vitamin D, important nutrients for building strong bones and healthy growth. Water hydrates for play, [protects against cavities](#) by reducing acid in the mouth, and helps maintain a healthy weight. Your program can support healthy beverage choices through menu planning.

### ➤ Fat-free or 1 Percent Milk Is Provided for Children (+)

Children older than 2 years of age, should be offered fat-free or 1 percent milk. Children 1-2 years of age should be offered whole milk. Offering milk at lunch and/or snack time can help children get the nutrients they need.

Example objectives:

1. Our program will substitute juice for low-fat milk during snack twice a week.
2. Our program will offer 1 percent or fat-free milk during lunch.
3. Our program will switch from 2 percent or whole milk to 1 percent or fat-free milk for children older than two years.

### ➤ Milk Is Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)

[Family style meals](#) are important to building a child's ability to listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues, determine servings sizes, and try new foods, etc. Make mealtime an opportunity to offer children healthy beverages and practice serving themselves.

Make low-fat milk and water available during meals. Offer beverages in small, clear pitchers that are partially full. Have staff available to assist children as needed.

Example objectives:

1. In the next three months, 1 percent or fat-free milk will be offered during meals in child-size pitchers. Children will be encouraged to serve themselves with staff assistance as needed.
2. Within three months, our program policy will be updated to include family-style meal service with strategies for serving beverages.
3. Staff will receive training on healthy beverages and family style meals annually.

### ➤ If Juice Is Served, It Is 100 Percent Fruit or Vegetable Juice (+)

Juice, even 100 percent fruit juice, has excess sugar and calories in a child's diet while offering limited nutrients. Juice should not be served to infants and should be [limited](#) with toddlers and preschoolers. To help limit the amount of juice children drink, offer only low-fat milk or water in your program. If you do offer juice, 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice is best. Fruit drinks, sodas, and punches are not appropriate for young children.

Example objectives:

1. In the next six months, program menus will be updated to only offer 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice.
2. Program menus will offer only 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice, once a week.
3. In the next six months, only fat-free or 1 percent milk and water will be offered at meals and snacks.

## Program Environment

Your program can support healthy nutrition beyond mealtimes and menu planning. Consider how you might encourage healthy drinks throughout the program day. Is water available for children to serve themselves throughout the day? Are images of healthy foods and drinks posted throughout the classroom? Do you offer books on healthy foods and drinks?

➤ **Drinking Water is Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)**

Water keeps children hydrated for play, protects against cavities, and helps maintain a healthy weight. Water should be available and accessible to children for self-serving throughout the day. This teaches children to monitor their own thirst, and water is a healthy drink choice. Find ideas in the CDC's [Increasing Access to Drinking Water and Other Healthier Beverages in Early Care and Education Settings](#) for ways to increase water in your program.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, water will be made accessible to children for self-serving.
2. In the next three months, program staff will name opportunities to make water available throughout the day.
3. In the next six months, the program will use the CDC resource, [Increasing Access to Drinking Water and Other Healthier Beverages in Early Care and Education Settings](#), to find ways to make water available in the program.

➤ **All Beverage Names Are Introduced to Children Prior to the Meal or Snack (+)**

Healthy beverages are part of a healthy diet. Introducing beverages to children helps them learn and become familiar with healthy beverages. Encourage children to try new beverages through fun learning experiences, such as teach new words, colors, math (spatial awareness, measuring), and fine motor skills.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, healthy beverages will be introduced to children. Pictures and names of beverages from the menu will be posted in the eating area.
2. Within three months, program staff (i.e. teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a healthy drink as part of a lesson plan.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to serve healthy beverages at home. Family activities and education will be provided to families.

➤ **Beverages Are Written and Pictured Near Where Children Eat (+)**

Healthy beverages are part of a healthy diet. Introducing beverages to children helps them learn and become familiar with healthy beverages. Pictures allow a child to learn and explore healthy beverages and meals. Pictures can encourage children to try a new drink. Encourage children to try new beverages through fun learning experiences, such as teaching new words, colors, math (spatial awareness, measuring), and motor skills (pouring).

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, pictures and names of beverages from the menu will be posted in the eating area.
2. Within three months, program staff (i.e. teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a healthy drink as part of a lesson plan.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to serve healthy beverages at home. Family activities and education will be provided to families.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

**Button Text:** Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text: Start Over*

## Meal Planning

Great choice! Providing healthy foods help children grow and learn. The foods your program serves support:

- Life-long eating habits
- Healthy weight and growth
- Nutrition needed to learn
- Variety of fruits and vegetables in a child's diet

[Tip] Think of small steps that children, staff, and families are more likely to accept and keep, such as healthier version of current favorites.

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text: Continue*

## Standards For Meal Planning

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFO3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Nutrition service requirements, 45 CFR § 1302.44 (a)
    - Child health status and care, 45 CFR § 1302.42(4)
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for meals

*Button Text: Continue*

## Recommended Practices for Meal Planning

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Meal Planning. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

## Program Policies

Program policies help guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

Your local community is a great place to find resources to support your staff. There are local agencies that support child nutrition such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), extension office, and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) center. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the Resource section for more.

Example policy: *Staff development will be offered annually regarding healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty such as a registered dietitian.*

➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

➤ Culturally Diverse Foods (+)

Culture refers to the "traditions, rituals, beliefs, and values that are shared among a group of people."

Explore different cultures to create opportunities for children to learn about common traits, customs and traditions. It is also an opportunity to teach self-esteem, acceptance and diversity. Offer diverse foods on your menus from different cultures as another teaching opportunity for children. [Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five](#) has additional ideas to increase diversity in your program.

A community assessment (conducted in Head Start programs or at your local health department) can identify different cultures represented in your community. Build staff development opportunities so staff are knowledgeable and comfortable discussing different cultures. It can also be helpful to reach out to communities of different cultures (i.e. faith leaders, immigrant advocates) to support staff, children and families.

Example policy: *Our program is dedicated to making all children feel welcome and represented. As part of this effort, our menus will offer culturally diverse foods. Staff will be trained in cultural diversity bi-annually and upon orientation. The program will work with community leaders for additional support.*

## Menu Selection

➤ The Menu Includes a Variety of Foods Which Consider Cultural and Ethnic Preferences (+)

Offer foods on your menu from different cultures as an opportunity to explore and welcome all children. Including culturally diverse foods can build self-awareness and self-esteem and teach acceptance and diversity.

Partnering registered dietitians, health care consultants, and TA specialists with community leaders can identify opportunities to incorporate healthy culturally diverse foods into your program. A family nutrition assessment during enrollment can also inform your menus. Talking with families during enrollment will help you learn their cultural needs and identify ways to support the children in your program.

Example questions: *Tell me about mealtime in your home? What types of foods do you normally serve? What is your child/family's favorite food? Are there any foods that you do not want your child to eat?*

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, our program will review and update our nutrition assessment/enrollment process to identify cultural and ethnic food preferences.
2. In the next three months, our program will partner with community leaders, families and/or a registered dietitian to identify opportunities to offer healthy foods from different cultures.
3. In the next year, our program will offer staff development on various cultures represented in our community. Community leaders will be engaged to support the program as often as possible.

➤ **Menu is Modified for Children with Food Allergies/Intolerances and Children With Disabilities (+)**

The most common food allergens include peanut, milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, and wheat. Depending on the allergen, it may be difficult to remove the food entirely from your menu.

Accommodating a child's severe sensitivity may require removing all possible exposure in the program and on the menu and supporting families. A registered dietitian, child care health consultant, or health care professional such as a nurse can help you identify the appropriate approach and strategies.

Once you are aware of a diagnosed food allergy:

- Menus are reviewed and modified as needed,
- Activities outside of mealtime, such as sensory play, food experiences, outdoor gross motor time, are identified and adapted,
- An [emergency action plan](#) is created with the family,
- Staff are trained on food allergies including symptoms and medication administration.

Example objectives:

1. In one month, our program will develop a policy on how we will address food allergies including menu changes.
2. As soon as a child is identified, our program will work with a medical professional (RD, RN) to identify possible menu changes to accommodate known (diagnosed) or common food allergens.
3. Staff will receive training on food allergies and medication administration including epinephrine administration annually.

## Program Environment

Mealtimes should be a safe and engaging learning environment for children to learn healthy habits, such as trying new foods, listening to their body's signs of hunger and fullness, and table manners.

The healthy changes you are trying to make in your program are also opportunities to teach children about nutrition. In addition to changes on your menu, consider how your program might support nutrition in the classroom. Communicate with staff and families to create a positive eating environment.

➤ **Menu Board Featuring Daily Meals and Snacks Are Available and Visible Near (e.g., Classroom or Dining Space) (+)**

Your mealtime can also be a learning environment. Staff can use menu boards to introduce new foods before mealtime. This allows young children to learn about the foods they are eating. Allow children to touch, smell, and talk about foods that may be new to them. Menu boards can also show healthy foods, the mealtime routine, and eating environment.

Example objectives:

1. Staff will update the menu boards monthly with pictures of foods on the menu.

2. Staff will offer learning experiences related to the foods on the menu monthly.
3. In the next six months, the program will offer activities and education for families about the program menu and learning goals. For example, family activities that focus on recognizing letters.

➤ **A Monthly Menu Is Provided to All Families and Staff (+)**

Families appreciate knowing what foods their child will be served throughout the day. Providing families with menus monthly is an opportunity to discuss healthy changes to your menu, the eating environment such as [family style meals](#), and ways they can support these efforts at home. You can:

- Encourage feedback on program menus or healthier menu options.
- Ask families for menu suggestions and send recipes of healthier versions home.
- Ask families to offer foods new to your menu at home to support picky eaters.
- Offer recipes of their child's favorite dishes.

Example objectives:

1. Program menus will be sent home monthly.
2. In the next three months, families will be engaged to offer menu suggestions such as their child's or family's favorite meal.
3. Families will receive healthy recipes, snack ideas, and activities monthly to support the program's menu.

➤ **A Monthly Nutrition and/or Physical Activity Message Is Included on the Monthly Menu (+)**

Families are interested in hearing how their child is eating or what foods they enjoy throughout the day. Your program menus can be great family engagement tools. Consider ways you can offer healthy activities as part of your monthly menu communication. Don't forget to include activities that help families move together. Regular activity in daily life is important to build long term movement habits. You could:

- Offer healthy recipes for meals and snacks
- Provide healthier recipes for family favorites
- Offer healthy nutrition information aligned to a food on your menu such as red peppers and Vitamin C
- Provide messaging aligned with a nutrition education framework such as [5,2,1,0](#).

Example objectives:

1. Program menus will be sent home with families monthly with related healthy, active living activities.
2. In the next month, staff will identify and determine possible 5,2,1,0 messaging to align with menus.
3. In the next six months, families will be engaged to determine what nutrition and physical activity messaging and/or supports they would like to learn about most.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time

Good! Mealtime can show children positive eating behaviors.

[Tip] Eating meals family-style support child development.

- Children learn new words during conversation with peers and staff.
- Children take turns to share food and drinks.
- Staff model good habits.

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFO3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child Nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44 (a)
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)(2)
    - Family support services for health, nutrition, and mental health, 45 CFR § 1302.46
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for Meal Service
      - (n) Family-style meal service. Family-style is a type of meal service, which allows children and adults to serve themselves from common platters of food with the assistance of supervising adults. Institutions and facilities choosing to exercise this option must be in compliance with the following practices:
        - (k) Time of meal service. State agencies may require any institution or facility to allow a specific amount of time to elapse between meal services or require that meal services not exceed a specified duration.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Meal Planning

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

- Mealtimes Takes Place at a Regularly Scheduled Time and as Part of Children's Daily Routine (+)  
Offering meals at the same time can support behavior, attention, and learning throughout the day. If children know the routine and schedule, they engage and participate more in your classroom. In addition to offering your meals at regularly scheduled times, consider:
  - Discussing and reviewing a daily schedule with visual cues children can revisit throughout the day.
  - Building consistent routines before and after mealtimes. For example, before meals children may sing a song, wash their hands, and set the table.

Example objectives:



- a. In the next month, our program will revise the mealtime policy to establish regularly scheduled meals and snacks. This will be done in collaboration with our cooks and teachers.
- b. In the next three months, our program will educate families on the importance of mealtime routines at home.

➤ Adults Caring for Children (e.g., Teachers, Assistants, Etc.) Have Been Trained and Model Appropriate Mealtime Behavior (+)

Adults caring for children play an important role in eating healthy foods and mealtime behavior. Provide training to staff to help them learn about [responsive feeding](#), and mealtime behaviors to practice in their classroom.

As you work with staff review their current practices. Do staff:

- Sit and eat the same foods as the children?
- Support picky eaters? Remember a child may need to be offered a food 10-15 times before they will try it.
- Refrain from using negative comments such as "I don't like carrots" or "Eat all your broccoli before you can have strawberries"?
- Support children listening to their hunger cues, using comments such as "How does your tummy feel?"
- Allow children to have seconds once everyone has a serving?

Example objectives:

1. In the next three months, staff will be observed during mealtime to identify possible needs for support and training.
2. Staff will be offered training annually on mealtime behaviors, [responsive feeding](#), and supporting healthy eaters.
3. In the next six months, activities will be offered for families to practice modeling healthy behaviors at home.

➤ Adults Caring for Children Turn Off All Visible Screens Including; Televisions, Tablets, Phones, Etc. During Mealtime and Engage in Conversation With the Children (+)

Watching television, reading tablets, checking phones, etc. during mealtime limits engagement opportunities with the children. Eating while watching screen time, can lead to overeating or ignoring hunger cues. Provide different opportunities for staff to check messages or use screens.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, the program's policy will be revised to prohibit staff from using screen time during meals. Staff will be offered different opportunities throughout the day to check messages.
2. In the next three months, families will be encouraged to reduce or limit screen time during meals. Activities or strategies will be offered to engage their child in conversation related to classroom activities.

## Menu Selection

➤ Enough Time During Meals (+)

Children should be offered plenty of time to eat and serve themselves. Hopefully, your program is able to offer at least 45 minutes for breakfast or lunch and 30 minutes for snack. It might be helpful to review how much time your program currently provides, observe how much time is actually offered, and ask if staff feel this time is adequate and manageable.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, our program's mealtime policy will be revised to include appropriate length of time for meals and snacks.
2. In the next three months, classroom staff will be asked to identify challenges regarding the length of meals and snacks. Staff will be asked to identify possible solutions.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to offer appropriate meal and snack times at home to support changes in the classroom.

➤ Staff Engagement in Menu Changes (+)

Offering healthier options on your program menus can introduce new foods not only to children in your program but staff as well. This is an opportunity to get input from staff regarding their food habits and perception of healthy foods. It is important to talk about staff's views when implementing an initiative since they are responsible for implementing changes. Ask staff for menu suggestions or favorites the cook can incorporate in healthier ways.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, staff will be asked for suggestions to incorporate healthier options on the menu by either the cook, health staff, or registered dietitian.
2. In the next three months, a team of classroom staff, program director, and any health-related staff (such as health manager, cook, dietitian) will identify possible healthier menu options.

## Program Environment

➤ Adults Caring for Children Sit With Children at the Table During Mealtime (+)

Caregivers play an important role in establishing a positive eating environment. Children look for adults to learn about trying new foods, appropriate serving sizes, and table manners. Staff may benefit from training to support picky eaters; understand serving sizes for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; and support children during meals. It is also important to support staff by offering breaks during times of the day other than child mealtimes.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, the program policy will be revised to require staff to sit with children at the table during mealtime. Support from other program staff will be offered as often as possible.
2. In the next three months, the mealtime environment will be observed to determine if program staff are sitting with the children and engaged in a positive, supportive way.
3. Staff will receive training annually on engaging children in positive eating environment, serving sizes, and supporting healthy eaters.

➤ Adults Caring for Children Discuss if Children's Stomachs Feel Full Before Serving a Second Helping of Food (+)

Encourage children to listen to their body's hunger cues and satiety (or fullness). Adults caring for children can help them recognize their hunger cues by offering opportunities during mealtime to evaluate their feelings of hunger and satiety.

Staff can:

1. Ask before mealtime begins, "How does your tummy feel?" and then again after most have finished their first serving.
2. Staff can ask during meal and snack time, "How does your tummy feel? Does it feel empty or full?"
3. At the end of mealtime ask again, "How does your tummy feel now?"

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, the program director will observe mealtimes to identify areas of support and training
2. Staff training will be offered annually to support staff in [responsive feeding](#).

➤ During Mealtime Staff Encourage Children to Try New or Less Preferred Foods (+)

As a caregiver, you play an important role to encourage healthy habits in young children. During mealtime, encourage children to try new foods by trying them yourself, sitting less picky eaters next to picky eaters, offering an opportunity to explore new foods before children are served during mealtime, such as throughout the day.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, mealtime observations will be used to measure how staff are encouraging children to try new foods.
2. In the next three months, classroom staff will use nutrition education to introduce new or less preferred foods to children.
3. Staff will receive training annually on role modeling and supporting healthy eaters.

➤ A Transition Activity Is Offered to Children When They're Done With Their Meal (+)

Transitions are powerful tools to successful mealtimes and a positive eating environment. It establishes a standard routine children rely upon to know when mealtime is completed. It also allows staff to offer activities until all children finish their meal. This can support mealtime behaviors and reduce pressure on staff to end mealtime early to monitor all children.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, teachers will create transition activities for mealtimes. Staff will choose a transition activity to fit their classroom.
2. In the next three months, program staff will identify opportunities for additional support during mealtime transitions.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to create family routines for mealtimes. Activities and suggestions will be offered for families to try at home.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Home Visiting

### Choose A Goal

Look at the results from your Positive Eating Environment Self-Assessment. Choose one area from the Self-Assessment to work on in your program.

[Tip] Start with the most challenging section. This is probably a section where you often checked "Never" and/or "Ready to Get Started."

I want to start with: -- Choose -- [Dropdown Box]

Dropdown Box Text:

Fruits

Vegetables

Beverages

Meal Planning

Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time

## Fruits

Great choice! Offering fruits regularly during meals and snacks can build healthy strong eating habits and get children ready to learn!

Fruits have nutrients such as:

- Vitamin A (supports vision; helps stop infections)
- Vitamin C (good for teeth and gums)
- Fiber (good for digestive health)

[Tip] Be careful of extra sugar in fruit juice or canned fruits. Sugar can cause dental problems and excess weight. Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Fruits

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFO3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
    - 4.7.0.1 Nutrition Learning Experiences for Children
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for meals
      - (3) Fruits. A serving may contain fresh, frozen, canned, dried fruits, or fruit juice. All fruits are based on their volume as served, except that ¼ cup of dried fruit counts as ½ cup of fruit
      - (i) Pasteurized, full-strength fruit juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Fruit juice or vegetable juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Fruits

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Fruits. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

## Program Policies

Policies guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

### ➤ Supporting Healthy Meals (+)

Creating a positive eating environment takes time, patience, and planning. Think about ways to build parts of the positive eating environment into your current practices even if your setting does not allow family-style dining. For example, how can staff engage children in positive, give-and-take conversation during mealtime? What policies can support these changes?

Think of ways to:

- Support staff. Sometimes, state licensing requirements have larger staff/child ratios. This can be difficult because mealtimes can be messy, making it hard to serve meals family-style. A policy supporting smaller staff/child ratios is one way to help staff during mealtime [[Head Start](#)]
- Support children. Hopefully you are able to offer family-style dining in your center. However, children, especially toddlers, may need help building skills in self-serving and mealtime behaviors such as sharing and passing. Think how your policies might support these skills. Are children offered the opportunity to practice pouring or self-serving during pretend play or snack time?

### ➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Many adults struggle with their own eating habits and what foods they view as healthy or tasty. A good place to start might be to ask staff their views of program menus and healthier foods. Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

If you do not have a contracted Registered Dietitian (RD), look to your local community. Agencies that support child nutrition include Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), the extension office, and Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) centers. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the resource section for more information.

Example policy: *Annually, staff will be offered training in healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty, such as a registered dietitian.*

### ➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

### ➤ Nutrition Education (+)

When considering changes to your menus or food service, it may be helpful to think about the role nutrition education can play. Incorporating healthy foods into weekly or monthly lesson plans can allow children to become more comfortable with new fruits, so they are more willing to try them at meals. A program policy defining nutrition education in your program and how often it should be used in lesson planning can be helpful. Remember, nutrition education is not only about healthy vs. unhealthy foods. [Healthy foods can be used to teach](#) colors, shapes, textures, science (how things grow), math (counting, sorting, and graphing).

Example policy: *The program will incorporate healthy foods into classroom lesson plans at least once a month. All effort will be made to use foods represented on the month's program menus.*

## Menu Selection

Having nutritious menus are important to improving children's health. Serving fruit in your program is a great way for children to get the nutrients they need. Try increasing the amount of fruits you serve daily, and work with families to try new fruits at home. Remember, we want children to eat at least [five fruits and vegetables](#) throughout the day, both at home and in your program.

### ➤ Fruit Is Available Daily (+)

Increase the amount of fruit you serve in your program. You can do this by offering a different fruit at every meal. It might be helpful to consider using fruits in season and partnering with local farmers and/or community gardens. While fresh is best, frozen or even canned fruit packed in water or 100 percent juice (not syrup) still offer important nutrients while being less expensive than fresh.

Example objectives:

- We will add one additional fruit daily to our menu.
- Our program will substitute fruit for 100 percent juice twice a week.
- Our program will offer fruit during snack time; for example, substitute apple slices for graham crackers.

### ➤ Fruit Options Include Fresh, Frozen, and Canned Fruit Packed in Water or 100 Percent Juice (Not Packed in Light or Heavy Syrup) (+)

Fresh fruit is best but can be expensive. Using local or seasonal produce can help your program offer fresh produce while staying within budget. Frozen and/or canned fruit packed in water or 100 percent juice (not syrup) are also acceptable, healthy alternatives to fresh fruit.

Example objectives:

- In the next six months, our program will substitute all fruit canned in syrup with fruit canned in water.
- Our program will serve one seasonal fruit monthly.
- Our program will serve one fresh fruit weekly.

### ➤ Fruit Options Are Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)

[Family style meals](#) are important to building a child's ability to listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues, determine serving sizes, and try new foods. Make mealtime an opportunity for children to try new fruits and practice serving themselves.

Example objectives:

1. Measuring cups will be used as serving utensils (1/4 cup of fruit for toddlers; 1/2 cup for preschoolers).
2. Staff will receive annual training on family-style dining.
3. Child-size equipment such as utensils, bowls, cups, and pitchers will be used during meals.

4. In the next month, fruits will be served at the same time and with the same presentation even if served as "dessert."
5. The program director will conduct monthly observations of mealtimes to find areas of improvement in family-style meal service.

## Program Environment

Your program spends considerable time establishing a safe and engaging [learning environment](#). Your mealtime is also a learning environment. During mealtimes, children learn healthy habits such as trying new foods, listening to their body's signs of hunger and fullness, and table manners.

- **All Fruit Names Are Introduced to the Children Prior to the Meal or Snack (+)**

The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of fruits. When you make additions or changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

  1. Program staff (assign a responsible person) will post pictures of fruits from the menus monthly around the classroom.
  2. One lesson plan a month will use fruits from that month's menu.
  3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new fruits. Family activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.
- **Fruit Names Are Written and/or Pictured Near Where Children Eat (+)**

The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of fruits. When you make additions or changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

  1. Pictures and words of fruits near the eating areas will be posted and updated monthly.
  2. Program staff (i.e. teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a new food from the program menu at least once a month.
  3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new fruits. Family activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.
- **Providers Role Model to Children How to Serve Themselves and Participate in Family-style Dining (+)**

Adults show examples of how to behave, interact with others, build friendships, and even eat during mealtime. Adults can role model positive mealtime behaviors by eating the same food, using positive language, and avoid bringing in outside food or drink when eating with children. Engage staff early and often when implementing program changes. Try creating a team with your staff to plan and implement the changes from your action plan. Have staff think about:

  1. What changes can they make?
  2. What do they need to make this change (i.e. training, resources, support)?
  3. What are challenges will you face?

Example objectives:

  1. Program policies will be updated within six months to reflect appropriate modeling during mealtimes. Staff will eat and drink the same food prepared for the children, meals will be

served family-style, staff development on healthy nutrition and role modeling will be offered annually.

2. Staff will receive training on child nutrition and role modeling healthy eating annually.
3. In the next month, a staff team will be created to help develop an action plan.
4. Program director will conduct monthly observations of meal service to determine areas of improvement in family-style meal service.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Vegetables

Vegetables have nutrients such as:

- Folate (support brain development)
- Calcium (supports bone health)
- Fiber (good for digestive health)
- B vitamins (how our bodies get energy from food)

[Tip] Offer vegetables in place of high-calorie snack foods.

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Vegetables

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - [Vegetables and Fruit Requirements in CACFP: Q&As](#)
      - § 226.20 Requirements for meals
        - (a)(2) Vegetables. A serving may contain fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables, dry beans and peas (legumes), or vegetable juice. All vegetables are credited based on their volume as served, except that 1 cup of leafy greens counts as 1/2 cup of vegetables.



- (a)(2)(ii) Pasteurized, full-strength vegetable juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Vegetable juice or fruit juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.
- (3)(ii) A vegetable may be used to meet the entire fruit requirement at lunch and supper. When two vegetables are served at lunch or supper, two different kinds of vegetables must be served.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Vegetables

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Vegetables. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Program policies help guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

#### ➤ Supporting Healthy Meals (+)

Creating a positive eating environment takes time, patience, and planning. Think about ways to build parts of the positive eating environment into your current practices even if your setting does not allow family-style dining. For example, how can staff engage children in positive, give-and-take conversation during mealtime? What policies can support these changes?

Think of ways to:

- Support staff. Sometimes, state licensing requirements have larger staff/child ratios. This can be difficult because mealtimes can be messy, making it hard to serve meals family-style. A policy supporting smaller staff/child ratios is one way to help staff during mealtime [[Head Start](#)]
- Support children. Hopefully you are able to offer family-style dining in your center. However, children, especially toddlers, may need help building skills in self-serving and mealtime behaviors such as sharing and passing. Think how your policies might support these skills. Are children offered the opportunity to practice pouring or self-serving during pretend play or snack time? Example policy: To create a positive eating environment, staff will receive additional support to reduce the staff/child ratio as often as possible.

#### ➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

Your local community is a great place to find resources to support your staff. There are local agencies that support child nutrition such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), extension office, and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) center. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the Resource section for more.

Example policy: *Staff development will be offered annually regarding healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty such as a registered dietitian.*

➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

➤ Nutrition Education (+)

When considering changes to your menus or food service, it may be helpful to think about the role nutrition education can play. Incorporating healthy foods into weekly or monthly lesson plans can allow children to become more comfortable with new fruits, so they are more willing to try them at meals. A program policy defining nutrition education in your program and how often it should be used in lesson planning can be helpful. Remember, nutrition education is not only about healthy vs. unhealthy foods. [Healthy foods can be used to teach](#) colors, shapes, textures, science (how things grow), math (counting, sorting, and graphing).

Example policy: *The program will incorporate healthy foods into classroom lesson plans at least once a month. Most of the foods will be represented on the month's program menus.*

## Menu Selection

Vegetables offer important nutrients to a child's diet. We know children do not eat enough fruits and vegetables each day; often consuming none. Depending on the community you serve, families in your program might struggle offering vegetables regularly at home or exposing their children to a variety of fruits and vegetables. We want all children to eat at least [five fruits and vegetables throughout the day](#). Your menus are a pivotal tool to improving children's diets and offering more fruits and vegetables each day.

➤ Vegetables Are Available Daily (+)

It might be helpful to consider using vegetables in season and partnering with local farmers and/or community gardens. While fresh is best, frozen or even canned vegetables labeled as reduced sodium or no-salt added can still offer important nutrients while being less expensive than fresh.

Example objectives:

1. We will partner with a registered dietitian to identify opportunities to incorporate vegetables. Our initial goal is one additional vegetable a week with eventual goal of two to three vegetables offered daily.
2. Our program will substitute fresh vegetables for canned vegetables twice a week.
3. Our program will determine opportunities to include vegetables as part of snack (i.e. substitute green pepper slices for graham crackers).

➤ Vegetable Options Include Fresh, Frozen, and Canned Vegetables Labeled as “Reduced Sodium” or “No-Salt Added” (+)

Fresh vegetables are best but can be expensive to use exclusively. Using local or seasonal produce can help your program stay within budget. Frozen and/or canned vegetables labeled as reduced sodium or no-salt-added are also acceptable, healthy alternatives to fresh vegetables.

Example objectives:

1. Partner with an RD to determine one opportunity a month to incorporate seasonal vegetables in program menu.
2. In the next month, program staff will create list of local farmers or community gardens.
3. Our program will substitute all offered canned vegetables for reduced sodium or no-salt added canned options.
4. Our program will substitute canned vegetables for frozen or fresh at least once a week.

➤ **Vegetable Options Are Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)**

[Family style meals](#) are important to building a child's ability to listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues, determine servings sizes, and try new foods, etc. It is important vegetable options are available for self-serving during mealtime equally to other foods.

Example objectives:

1. Program director will conduct monthly observations of meal service to determine areas of improvement in family-style meal service.
2. Program cook will offer measuring cups (1/4 cup of vegetables for toddlers; 1/2 cup for preschoolers) as serving utensils.
3. Staff development will be provided annually on family style meals including serving sizes for toddler and preschoolers; [responsive feeding](#); and strategies for successful implementation.
4. All foods will be served in similar size and color bowls for self-serving.

## Program Environment

Your program spends considerable time establishing a safe and engaging [learning environment](#). Your mealtime is also a learning environment. During mealtimes, children learn healthy habits such as trying new foods, listening to their body's signs of hunger and fullness, and table manners.

➤ **All Vegetable Names Are Introduced to the Children Prior to the Meal or Snack (+)**

The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of vegetables. When you make changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

1. Program staff (assign a responsible person) will post pictures of vegetables around the classroom.
2. Program staff will add lessons monthly on vegetables.
3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new vegetables. Sample activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.

➤ **Vegetable Names Are Written and/or Pictured Near Where Children Eat (+)**

The children in your care may not be exposed to a variety of vegetables. When you make changes to your menus, you might be introducing a new food to a child. Allowing a child to learn about or even explore a new food before it is put on their plate can help a picky eater be more willing to try a new food. This can also be a learning opportunity. You can use the new food to teach colors, shapes, how things grow (science), language, texture, etc.

Example objectives:

1. Pictures and words of vegetables near the eating areas will be posted and updated monthly.

2. Program staff (teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a new food from the program menu at least once a month.
3. Families will engage in monthly activities to try new vegetables. Sample activities, recipes, and when possible, donated foods will be provided to families.

- **Providers Role Model to Children How to Serve Themselves and Participate in Family-style Dining (+)**  
Adults show examples of how to behave, interact with others, build friendships, and even eat during mealtime. Adults can role model positive mealtime behaviors by eating the same food and using positive language, and avoid bringing in outside food or drink when eating with children.  
Engage staff early and often when implementing program changes. Try creating a team with your staff to plan and implement the changes from your action plan. Have staff think about:
1. What changes can they make?
  2. What do they need to make this change (i.e. training, resources, support)?
  3. What are challenges will you face?

Example objectives:

1. Program policies will be updated within six months to reflect appropriate modeling during mealtimes. Staff will eat and drink the same food prepared for the children, meals will be served family-style, staff development on healthy nutrition and role modeling will be offered annually.
2. In the next month, a staff team will be created to help develop an action plan.
3. Staff will receive training on child nutrition and role modeling healthy eating annually.
4. Program director will conduct monthly observations of meal service to determine areas of improvement in family-style meal service.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Beverages

Right on track! Beverages such as water and low-fat milk are part of a healthy diet.

[Tip] It's okay to offer 100 percent juice to preschoolers in small amounts. They can drink up to 4-6 oz. of 100 percent juice a day, either at home or in the program.

Infants should not be offered any juice. Sugary drinks cause infants and toddlers to prefer sweet, sugary flavors.

For infants, sugary drinks:

- Make them less likely to drink water
- Increases their risk for tooth decay and excess weight

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Beverages

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.

- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
    - 4.2.06 Availability of Drinking Water
    - 4.2.07 100 Percent Fruit Juice
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44 (a)(2)(ix)
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for meals
      - (1) Fluid milk. Fluid milk must be served as a beverage or on cereal, or a combination of both, as follows:
        - (i) Children 1 year old. Children one year of age must be served unflavored whole milk.
        - (ii) Children 2 through 5 years old. Children two through five years old must be served either unflavored low-fat (1 percent) or unflavored fat-free (skim) milk.
      - (2)(i) Pasteurized, full-strength vegetable juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Vegetable juice or fruit juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.
        - (i) Pasteurized, full-strength fruit juice may be used to fulfill the entire requirement. Fruit juice or vegetable juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day.
        - (ii) A vegetable may be used to meet the entire fruit requirement at lunch and supper. When two vegetables are served at lunch or supper, two different kinds of vegetables must be served.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Beverages

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Beverages. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Program policies help guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

#### ➤ Supporting Healthy Meals (+)

Creating a positive eating environment takes time, patience, and planning. Think about ways to build parts of the positive eating environment into your current practices even if your setting does not allow family-style dining. For example, how can staff engage children in positive, give-and-take conversation during mealtime? What policies can support these changes?

Think of ways to:

- Support staff. Sometimes, state licensing requirements have larger staff/child ratios. This can be difficult because mealtimes can be messy, making it hard to serve meals family-style. A policy supporting smaller staff/child ratios is one way to help staff during mealtime [[Head Start](#)]
- Support children. Hopefully you are able to offer family-style dining in your center. However, children, especially toddlers, may need help building skills in self-serving and mealtime behaviors such as sharing and passing. Think how your policies might support these skills. Are children offered the opportunity to practice pouring or self-serving during pretend play or snack time? Example policy: To create a positive eating environment, staff will receive additional support to reduce the staff/child ratio as often as possible.

➤ Staff Development (+)

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

Your local community is a great place to find resources to support your staff. There are local agencies that support child nutrition such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), extension office, and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) center. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the Resource section for more.

Example policy: *Staff will receive training on child nutrition annually regarding healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty such as a registered dietitian.*

➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

➤ Nutrition Education (+)

When considering changes to your menus or food service, it may be helpful to think about the role nutrition education can play. Incorporating healthy foods into weekly or monthly lesson plans can allow children to become more comfortable with new fruits, so they are more willing to try them at meals. A program policy defining nutrition education in your program and how often it should be used in lesson planning can be helpful. Remember, nutrition education is not only about healthy vs. unhealthy foods. Healthy beverages can be used to teach new words, colors, math (spatial awareness, measuring) and fine motor skills.

Example policy: *The program will incorporate healthy foods into classroom lesson plans at least once a month. Most of the foods will be represented on the month's program menus.*

## Menu Selection

Healthy drinks such as low-fat milk and water are important to a child's diet and healthy growth. Low-fat milk offers calcium and Vitamin D, important nutrients for building strong bones and healthy growth. Water hydrates for play, [protects against cavities](#) by reducing acid in the mouth, and helps maintain a healthy weight. Your program can support healthy beverage choices through menu planning.

➤ **Fat-free or 1 Percent Milk Is Provided for Children (+)**

Children older than 2 years of age, should be offered fat-free or 1 percent milk. Children 1-2 years of age should be offered whole milk. Offering milk at lunch and/or snack time can help children get the nutrients they need.

Example objectives:

1. Our program will substitute juice for low-fat milk during snack twice a week.
2. Our program will offer 1 percent or fat-free milk during lunch.
3. Our program will switch from 2 percent or whole milk to 1 percent or fat-free milk for children older than two years.

➤ **Milk Is Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)**

[Family style meals](#) are important to building a child's ability to listen to their body's hunger and fullness cues, determine servings sizes, and try new foods, etc. Make mealtime an opportunity to offer children healthy beverages and practice serving themselves.

Make low-fat milk and water available during meals. Offer beverages in small, clear pitchers that are partially full. Have staff available to assist children as needed.

Example objectives:

1. In the next three months, 1 percent or fat-free milk will be offered during meals in child-size pitchers. Children will be encouraged to serve themselves with staff assistance as needed.
2. Within three months, our program policy will be updated to include family-style meal service with strategies for serving beverages.
3. Staff will receive training on healthy beverages and family style meals annually.

➤ **If Juice Is Served, It Is 100 Percent Fruit or Vegetable Juice (+)**

Juice, even 100 percent fruit juice, has excess sugar and calories in a child's diet while offering limited nutrients. Juice should not be served to infants and should be [limited](#) with toddlers and preschoolers. To help limit the amount of juice children drink, offer only low-fat milk or water in your program. If you do offer juice, 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice is best. Fruit drinks, sodas, and punches are not appropriate for young children.

Example objectives:

1. In the next six months, program menus will be updated to only offer 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice.
2. Program menus will offer only 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice, once a week.
3. In the next six months, only fat-free or 1 percent milk and water will be offered at meals and snacks.

## Program Environment

Your program can support healthy nutrition beyond mealtimes and menu planning. Consider how you might encourage healthy drinks throughout the program day. Is water available for children to serve themselves throughout the day? Are images of healthy foods and drinks posted throughout the classroom? Do you offer books on healthy foods and drinks?

➤ **Drinking Water is Accessible to Children for Self-serving (+)**

Water keeps children hydrated for play, protects against cavities, and helps maintain a healthy weight. Water should be available and accessible to children for self-serving throughout the day. This teaches children to monitor their own thirst, and water is a healthy drink choice. Find ideas in the CDC's [Increasing Access to Drinking Water and Other Healthier Beverages in Early Care and Education Settings](#) for ways to increase water in your program.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, water will be made accessible to children for self-serving.
2. In the next three months, program staff will name opportunities to make water available throughout the day.
3. In the next six months, the program will use the CDC resource, *Increasing Access to Drinking Water and Other Healthier Beverages in Early Care and Education Settings*, to find ways to make water available in the program.

➤ **All Beverage Names Are Introduced to Children Prior to the Meal or Snack (+)**

Healthy beverages are part of a healthy diet. Introducing beverages to children helps them learn and become familiar with healthy beverages. Encourage children to try new beverages through fun learning experiences, such as teach new words, colors, math (spatial awareness, measuring), and fine motor skills.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, healthy beverages will be introduced to children. Pictures and names of beverages from the menu will be posted in the eating area.
2. Within three months, program staff (i.e. teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a healthy drink as part of a lesson plan.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to serve healthy beverages at home. Family activities and education will be provided to families.

➤ **Beverages Are Written and Pictured Near Where Children Eat (+)**

Healthy beverages are part of a healthy diet. Introducing beverages to children helps them learn and become familiar with healthy beverages. Pictures allow a child to learn and explore healthy beverages and meals. Pictures can encourage children to try a new drink. Encourage children to try new beverages through fun learning experiences, such as teaching new words, colors, math (spatial awareness, measuring), and motor skills (pouring).

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, pictures and names of beverages from the menu will be posted in the eating area.
2. Within three months, program staff (i.e. teacher, director, education manager) will create a learning opportunity in the classroom to introduce a healthy drink as part of a lesson plan.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to serve healthy beverages at home. Family activities and education will be provided to families.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

## Meal Planning

Great choice! Providing healthy foods help children grow and learn. The foods your program serves support:

- Life-long eating habits
- Healthy weight and growth



- Nutrition needed to learn
- Variety of fruits and vegetables in a child's diet

[Tip] Think of small steps that children, staff, and families are more likely to accept and keep, such as healthier version of current favorites.

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Meal Planning

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Nutrition service requirements, 45 CFR § 1302.44 (a)
    - Child health status and care, 45 CFR § 1302.42(4)
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for meals

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Meal Planning

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Meal Planning. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

Program policies help guide your action plan and show how you might reach your goals. Think about what policies you already have and what supports you may need.

- Staff Development (+)
 

To implement your action plan, help your staff build the skills and confidence they need to make changes in their classroom. Support staff by providing information and strategies on child nutrition, role modeling, [responsive feeding](#), healthy habits, mealtime behaviors, and how the eating environment supports early learning.

Think about the staff you already have.

- What are their skills?
- Have they received training to support their skills in the last 12 months?
- Do they practice healthy eating habits for themselves?

Think about these questions when creating a staff development plan. Be mindful of the budget, staff turnover, and time, which can affect your plan as well.

Your local community is a great place to find resources to support your staff. There are local agencies that support child nutrition such as Women Infants and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), extension office, and the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) center. There are also many national resources and trainings available. Check the Resource section for more.

Example policy: *Staff development will be offered annually regarding healthy meals, the role of nutrition in learning, engaging children appropriately in healthy eating and mealtime routines, and [responsive feeding](#). All efforts will be made to engage qualified faculty such as a registered dietitian.*

➤ Support From a Nutrition Expert Preferably a Registered Dietitian (+)

When making healthy changes, especially menu changes in your program, it is helpful to work with a nutrition expert, preferably a registered dietitian. This specialized health expert can identify opportunities for improvement and offer cost saving suggestions. You can [find a local RD](#) at a nearby university, hospital, extension, and WIC office.

Example policy: *The program will contract with a nutrition expert to review and enhance menus, provide staff development, and evaluate the mealtime environment.*

➤ Culturally Diverse Foods (+)

Culture refers to the "traditions, rituals, beliefs, and values that are shared among a group of people."

Explore different cultures to create opportunities for children to learn about common traits, customs and traditions. It is also an opportunity to teach self-esteem, acceptance and diversity. Offer diverse foods on your menus from different cultures as another teaching opportunity for children. [Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Ages Birth to Five](#) has additional ideas to increase diversity in your program.

A community assessment (conducted in Head Start programs or at your local health department) can identify different cultures represented in your community. Build staff development opportunities so staff are knowledgeable and comfortable discussing different cultures. It can also be helpful to reach out to communities of different cultures (i.e. faith leaders, immigrant advocates) to support staff, children and families.

Example policy: *Our program is dedicated to making all children feel welcome and represented. As part of this effort, our menus will offer culturally diverse foods. Staff will be trained in cultural diversity bi-annually and upon orientation. The program will work with community leaders for additional support.*

## Menu Selection

➤ The Menu Includes a Variety of Foods Which Consider Cultural and Ethnic Preferences (+)

Offer foods on your menu from different cultures as an opportunity to explore and welcome all children. Including culturally diverse foods can build self-awareness and self-esteem and teach acceptance and diversity.

Partnering registered dietitians, health care consultants, and TA specialists with community leaders can identify opportunities to incorporate healthy culturally diverse foods into your program. A family nutrition assessment during enrollment can also inform your menus. Talking with families during enrollment will help you learn their cultural needs and identify ways to support the children in your program.

Example questions: *Tell me about mealtime in your home? What types of foods do you normally serve? What is your child/family's favorite food? Are there any foods that you do not want your child to eat?*

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, our program will review and update our nutrition assessment/enrollment process to identify cultural and ethnic food preferences.
2. In the next three months, our program will partner with community leaders, families and/or a registered dietitian to identify opportunities to offer healthy foods from different cultures.
3. In the next year, our program will offer staff development on various cultures represented in our community. Community leaders will be engaged to support the program as often as possible.

➤ Menu is Modified for Children with Food Allergies/Intolerances and Children With Disabilities (+)

The most common food allergens include peanut, milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, and wheat. Depending on the allergen, it may be difficult to remove the food entirely from your menu.

Accommodating a child's severe sensitivity may require removing all possible exposure in the program and on the menu and supporting families. A registered dietitian, child care health consultant, or health care professional such as a nurse can help you identify the appropriate approach and strategies.

Once you are aware of a diagnosed food allergy:

- Menus are reviewed and modified as needed,
- Activities outside of mealtime, such as sensory play, food experiences, outdoor gross motor time, are identified and adapted,
- An [emergency action plan](#) is created with the family,
- Staff are trained on food allergies including symptoms and medication administration.

Example objectives:

1. In one month, our program will develop a policy on how we will address food allergies including menu changes.
2. As soon as a child is identified, our program will work with a medical professional (RD, RN) to identify possible menu changes to accommodate known (diagnosed) or common food allergens.
3. Staff will receive training on food allergies and medication administration including epinephrine administration annually.

## Program Environment

Mealtimes should be a safe and engaging learning environment for children to learn healthy habits, such as trying new foods, listening to their body's signs of hunger and fullness, and table manners.

The healthy changes you are trying to make in your program are also opportunities to teach children about nutrition. In addition to changes on your menu, consider how your program might support nutrition in the classroom. Communicate with staff and families to create a positive eating environment.

➤ Menu Board Featuring Daily Meals and Snacks Are Available and Visible Near (e.g., Classroom or Dining Space) (+)

Your mealtime can also be a learning environment. Staff can use menu boards to introduce new foods before mealtime. This allows young children to learn about the foods they are eating. Allow children to touch, smell, and talk about foods that may be new to them. Menu boards can also show healthy foods, the mealtime routine, and eating environment.

Example objectives:

1. Staff will update the menu boards monthly with pictures of foods on the menu.
2. Staff will offer learning experiences related to the foods on the menu monthly.
3. In the next six months, the program will offer activities and education for families about the program menu and learning goals. For example, family activities that focus on recognizing letters.

➤ A Monthly Menu Is Provided to All Families and Staff (+)

Families appreciate knowing what foods their child will be served throughout the day. Providing families with menus monthly is an opportunity to discuss healthy changes to your menu, the eating environment such as [family style meals](#), and ways they can support these efforts at home. You can:

- Encourage feedback on program menus or healthier menu options.
- Ask families for menu suggestions and send recipes of healthier versions home.
- Ask families to offer foods new to your menu at home to support picky eaters.
- Offer recipes of their child's favorite dishes.

Example objectives:

1. Program menus will be sent home monthly.
2. In the next three months, families will be engaged to offer menu suggestions such as their child's or family's favorite meal.
3. Families will receive healthy recipes, snack ideas, and activities monthly to support the program's menu.

➤ **A Monthly Nutrition and/or Physical Activity Message Is Included on the Monthly Menu (+)**

Families are interested in hearing how their child is eating or what foods they enjoy throughout the day. Your program menus can be great family engagement tools. Consider ways you can offer healthy activities as part of your monthly menu communication. Don't forget to include activities that help families move together. Regular activity in daily life is important to build long term movement habits. You could:

- Offer healthy recipes for meals and snacks
- Provide healthier recipes for family favorites
- Offer healthy nutrition information aligned to a food on your menu such as red peppers and Vitamin C
- Provide messaging aligned with a nutrition education framework such as [5,2,1,0](#).

Example objectives:

1. Program menus will be sent home with families monthly with related healthy, active living activities.
2. In the next month, staff will identify and determine possible 5,2,1,0 messaging to align with menus.
3. In the next six months, families will be engaged to determine what nutrition and physical activity messaging and/or supports they would like to learn about most.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over

### [Provider Role\(s\) During Meal/Snack Time](#)

Good! Mealtime can show children positive eating behaviors.

[Tip] Eating meals family-style support child development.

- Children learn new words during conversation with peers and staff.
- Children take turns to share food and drinks.
- Staff model good habits.

Build your action plan and consider changes your program may need to make to policies, menus, environment, and staff engagement.

Select Continue to find ideas and suggestions.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Standards For Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time

Look at the recommended practices, and think about how they can help your program. Links will open in a separate browser tab.

About these Standards [Pop-up Box]

- Caring for Our Children is a collection of national standards that represent the best practices, based on evidence, expertise, and experience, for quality health and safety policies and practice for today's early care and education settings.
- Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) are set forth in the Head Start Act of 2007 to govern how and what Head Start agencies provide to children and families.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburse centers (licensed or approved to provide day care services) at free, reduced-price, or paid rates for eligible meals and snacks served to enrolled children, that meet specific requirements.
  - Caring for Our Children (CFOC3)
    - 9.2.3.11 Food and Nutrition Service Policies and Plans
    - 4.2.0.9 Written Menus and Introduction of New Foods
    - 4.2.0.1 Written Nutrition Plans
  - Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
    - Child Nutrition, 45 CFR § 1302.44 (a)
    - Promoting learning through approaches to rest meals, routines, and physical activity, 45 CFR § 1302.31 (e)(2)
    - Family support services for health, nutrition, and mental health, 45 CFR § 1302.46
  - Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
    - § 226.20 Requirements for Meal Service
      - (n) Family-style meal service. Family-style is a type of meal service, which allows children and adults to serve themselves from common platters of food with the assistance of supervising adults. Institutions and facilities choosing to exercise this option must be in compliance with the following practices:
      - (k) Time of meal service. State agencies may require any institution or facility to allow a specific amount of time to elapse between meal services or require that meal services not exceed a specified duration.

*Button Text:* Continue

## Recommended Practices for Meal Planning

In this section, you'll find recommended policies and practices that will help you support your chosen goal, Provider Role(s) During Meal/Snack Time. Use the (+) icon to choose one or two activities you want to work on. Remember, you can always go back and pick new activities later.

### Program Policies

- Mealtimes Takes Place at a Regularly Scheduled Time and as Part of Children's Daily Routine (+)  
Offering meals at the same time can support behavior, attention, and learning throughout the day. If children know the routine and schedule, they engage and participate more in your classroom. In addition to offering your meals at regularly scheduled times, consider:
  - Discussing and reviewing a daily schedule with visual cues children can revisit throughout the day.
  - Building consistent routines before and after mealtimes. For example, before meals children may sing a song, wash their hands, and set the table.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, our program will revise the mealtime policy to establish regularly scheduled meals and snacks. This will be done in collaboration with our cooks and teachers.

2. In the next three months, our program will educate families on the importance of mealtime routines at home.

➤ Adults Caring for Children (e.g., Teachers, Assistants, Etc.) Have Been Trained and Model Appropriate Mealtime Behavior (+)

Adults caring for children play an important role in eating healthy foods and mealtime behavior. Provide training to staff to help them learn about [responsive feeding](#), and mealtime behaviors to practice in their classroom.

As you work with staff review their current practices. Do staff:

- Sit and eat the same foods as the children?
- Support picky eaters? Remember a child may need to be offered a food 10-15 times before they will try it.
- Refrain from using negative comments such as "I don't like carrots" or "Eat all your broccoli before you can have strawberries"?
- Support children listening to their hunger cues, using comments such as "How does your tummy feel?"
- Allow children to have seconds once everyone has a serving?

Example objectives:

1. In the next three months, staff will be observed during mealtime to identify possible needs for support and training.
2. Staff will be offered training annually on mealtime behaviors, [responsive feeding](#), and supporting healthy eaters.
3. In the next six months, activities will be offered for families to practice modeling healthy behaviors at home.

➤ Adults Caring for Children Turn Off All Visible Screens Including; Televisions, Tablets, Phones, Etc. During Mealtime and Engage in Conversation With the Children (+)

Watching television, reading tablets, checking phones, etc. during mealtime limits engagement opportunities with the children. Eating while watching screen time, can lead to overeating or ignoring hunger cues. Provide different opportunities for staff to check messages or use screens.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, the program's policy will be revised to prohibit staff from using screen time during meals. Staff will be offered different opportunities throughout the day to check messages.
2. In the next three months, families will be encouraged to reduce or limit screen time during meals. Activities or strategies will be offered to engage their child in conversation related to classroom activities.

## Menu Selection

➤ Enough Time During Meals (+)

Children should be offered plenty of time to eat and serve themselves. Hopefully, your program is able to offer at least 45 minutes for breakfast or lunch and 30 minutes for snack. It might be helpful to review how much time your program currently provides, observe how much time is actually offered, and ask if staff feel this time is adequate and manageable.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, our program's mealtime policy will be revised to include appropriate length of time for meals and snacks.
2. In the next three months, classroom staff will be asked to identify challenges regarding the length of meals and snacks. Staff will be asked to identify possible solutions.

3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to offer appropriate meal and snack times at home to support changes in the classroom.

➤ Staff Engagement in Menu Changes (+)

Offering healthier options on your program menus can introduce new foods not only to children in your program but staff as well. This is an opportunity to get input from staff regarding their food habits and perception of healthy foods. It is important to talk about staff's views when implementing an initiative since they are responsible for implementing changes. Ask staff for menu suggestions or favorites the cook can incorporate in healthier ways.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, staff will be asked for suggestions to incorporate healthier options on the menu by either the cook, health staff, or registered dietitian.
2. In the next three months, a team of classroom staff, program director, and any health-related staff (such as health manager, cook, dietitian) will identify possible healthier menu options.

## Program Environment

➤ Adults Caring for Children Sit With Children at the Table During Mealtime (+)

Caregivers play an important role in establishing a positive eating environment. Children look for adults to learn about trying new foods, appropriate serving sizes, and table manners. Staff may benefit from training to support picky eaters; understand serving sizes for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; and support children during meals. It is also important to support staff by offering breaks during times of the day other than child mealtimes.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, the program policy will be revised to require staff to sit with children at the table during mealtime. Support from other program staff will be offered as often as possible.
2. In the next three months, the mealtime environment will be observed to determine if program staff are sitting with the children and engaged in a positive, supportive way.
3. Staff will receive training annually on engaging children in positive eating environment, serving sizes, and supporting healthy eaters.

➤ Adults Caring for Children Discuss if Children's Stomachs Feel Full Before Serving a Second Helping of Food (+)

Encourage children to listen to their body's hunger cues and satiety (or fullness). Adults caring for children can help them recognize their hunger cues by offering opportunities during mealtime to evaluate their feelings of hunger and satiety.

Staff can:

1. Ask before mealtime begins, "How does your tummy feel?" and then again after most have finished their first serving.
2. Staff can ask during meal and snack time, "How does your tummy feel? Does it feel empty or full?"
3. At the end of mealtime ask again, "How does your tummy feel now?"

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, the program director will observe mealtimes to identify areas of support and training
2. Staff training will be offered annually to support staff in [responsive feeding](#).

➤ During Mealtime Staff Encourage Children to Try New or Less Preferred Foods (+)

As a caregiver, you play an important role to encourage healthy habits in young children. During mealtime, encourage children to try new foods by trying them yourself, sitting less picky eaters next to picky eaters, offering an opportunity to explore new foods before children are served during mealtime, such as throughout the day.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, mealtime observations will be used to measure how staff are encouraging children to try new foods.
2. In the next three months, classroom staff will use nutrition education to introduce new or less preferred foods to children.
3. Staff will receive training annually on role modeling and supporting healthy eaters.

➤ A Transition Activity Is Offered to Children When They're Done With Their Meal (+)

Transitions are powerful tools to successful mealtimes and a positive eating environment. It establishes a standard routine children rely upon to know when mealtime is completed. It also allows staff to offer activities until all children finish their meal. This can support mealtime behaviors and reduce pressure on staff to end mealtime early to monitor all children.

Example objectives:

1. In the next month, teachers will create transition activities for mealtimes. Staff will choose a transition activity to fit their classroom.
2. In the next three months, program staff will identify opportunities for additional support during mealtime transitions.
3. In the next six months, families will be encouraged to create family routines for mealtimes. Activities and suggestions will be offered for families to try at home.

When you have finished adding items to your Action Plan, print or save your plan for later reference.

*Button Text:* Print Your Action Plan

*Button Text:* Start Over