

Supporting Healthy Eating at Home: A Training Module for Home Visitors

Module Two

Narrator: Supporting Healthy Eating at Home: A Training Module for Home Visitors. Welcome to Module Two. Family meal time can be an important opportunity to support child development. This is the second module in a three-part series targeting healthy eating at home. This particular module explores the role family meal time can play as a learning opportunity to support development. We encourage you to review all three series in this module for more information about supporting responsive feeding and building healthy habits. Eating and mealtimes are more than just food or nourishing our bodies. While important, food means much more to us than that. It is how we celebrate joy or even offer comfort to friends and loved ones in times of need.

Think back on a time when you celebrated a life event or family milestone. What food was served? How did you feel? What are your favorite memories?

So much about who we are, where we come from, and what we share with our children is centered around food. Why is it then that we don't use food in our classrooms or home visits as often as we might? Take a moment to reflect on your experiences using food as a learning tool in past home visits or classroom lesson plans. What were you teaching? How did you use food to convey this message? Meal time can be a logical supplement and support to the weekly lesson plans you build with families. It might also be helpful to consider the skills practiced during meal time within the context of the Early Learning Framework. For example, how does mealtime support social and emotional development, cognition, language, motor and physical development, and of course, approaches to learning? The next few slides give several examples of how mealtime can support all of these domains of early learning.

But more importantly, they can support your early learning goals targeted within your lesson plans each week. For example, a learning goal for you and the family is to develop their 2-year-old's language development. While you might spend your 90 minutes that week on a separate activity, mealtimes are an identifiable, tangible time families can support their child one on one with these skills. Or you might use food and nutrition in your weekly lesson plan. For example, your learning goals lie within the cognition and mathematics development domain. How might you use food as a teaching tool, not just at meal time but within your weekly lesson plan? Meal times in early infancy was very different than in toddlers, preschoolers, or even late infancy. If you remember from our first module, before the introduction of solids, infants are fed only breast milk or formula and on demand. However, these feeding can still be learning opportunities. When a caregiver holds a baby and makes eye contact, they are building social and emotional functioning. The infant and caregiver are forging a trusting relationship. The infant communicates hunger and fullness in the language they have available.

When the caregiver listens and responds to these communications, the infant learns this is a trusting and supportive relationship. Furthermore, the caregiver can build language skills by talking to their infant during feeding. Sharing words, facial expressions, and laughter support cognition and language development. In time, infants will build motor skills that can be supported during meal time. The infant will hold its own bottle, sit up with support, and as solid foods are introduced, practice fine motor skills, such as grasping, hand eye coordination, manipulating small objects such as utensils. The caregiver can use mealtime as an opportunity to support all these learning domains. As infants grow, they reach different feeding milestones. They develop the ability to sit without support. As spoons are introduced, they develop fine motor skills by manipulating utensils. They also develop a pincher grasp around nine months. Mealtimes are a perfect opportunity to practice the fine motor skills by picking up small food items such as fresh fruits or vegetables. Additionally, this is a great opportunity to explore textures of different foods, but also the same foods. Caregivers can serve different shapes and colors. As we discussed

in the first module of this series, infants develop more advanced communication skills, especially when expressing hunger or fullness cues.

Many providers offer sign language as a method for building these communication skills in addition to cognition. And the social emotional bond and trusting relationship continue to be supported during meal time. As infants grow into toddlers, they can interact more with caregivers and begin building skills needed to participate in family style meals. They begin to learn meal time expectations, such as table manners, timing, how to interact throughout a meal, and once the meal is over. This was also an opportunity for families to share stories about their own childhood, their day, or even make believe. As we mentioned in the beginning of this module, food is more to us than nourishment. It often ties back to our family culture, our community, or even ethnicity. Meals are a great opportunity to share our culture with our children and cultivate a connection in the family and their community. Families can reinforce your lesson plan by cutting foods in shapes. They can engage their child in counting food items, such as how many apple slices do you have. They can offer different textures or cooking methods, especially with new foods that maybe weren't accepted initially, such as baked sweet potato, versus mashed, versus cut into long strips for dipping.

And involve children in preparing food. As their skills develop, they can set the table or wherever a family shares the meal, wash fruit and vegetables, stir, pour, mix, and even measure. It might help reminding parents these strategies not only help their child learn but make mealtime fun, an important strategy with picky eaters. Mealtimes are an opportunity for toddlers and preschoolers to learn. As the child ages and matures, families can be even more creative. They can use clear pitchers and glasses to build logic and math skills. Spatial awareness comes with a visual picture of how much they've poured. Clear pitchers allow children to discriminate between less and more. And as the child's skills develop, they can be trusted with more mealtime responsibilities. First and foremost about this module is the message that parents are their child's first teacher. Their child looks to the parent for guidance, communication, laughter, love, and role modeling expectations. Mealtimes are a great opportunity for all of those. Encourage parents to limit distractions and spend one on one time with their family to interact, make eye contact, demonstrate joy, laughter, and love.

Share facial expressions. Even silly faces can build communication skills. And above all, mealtimes are the perfect opportunity for parents to teach healthy habits by showing the healthy foods they eat. Especially as babies develop the pincher grasp and parents often are tempted to share food, it is important, their food, which the infant will inevitably want, is healthy. This builds the expectations of what food their child should eat. Within this context, meals can also support goals developed within the Family Engagement Framework. The program impact areas include building family partnerships and teaching and learning. As a home visitor, you are partnering with the family to build specific learning goals, which can be supported during meal time. In addition, you can also build family health goals, such as eating meals regularly as much as possible as a family, turning off screen time, or serving healthier foods. These are all commonly reflected in your family partnerships agreement.

A positive eating environment and responsive eating, something discussed in depth in module one, directly support many family engagement outcomes, such as family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, families as lifelong educators, and families as learners. Families may not think of meal time as an opportunity to teach their children anything. You can help families think of concrete ways they can support your lesson plan. Look for simple concrete things they can do during their next meal time, such as serve a red food if your lesson plan involves identifying red things. Talk about a character in a new book you brought. Incorporate a new word or maybe just a positive encouragement to their child. Meals or sometimes a rare opportunity for families to sit and get to know one another without distraction, without time commitment, and without outside stressors. Help them use this time as an opportunity for bonding

and enjoying their children. They can tell a silly story from their childhood, a favorite memory, or just make their child laugh. These are sample questions you might use with families to introduce the learning opportunities within shared meal time.

If you are looking for additional support around healthy, active living, the behaviors we want families to adopt, and more strategies that may help your families, you may find The Little Voices for Healthy Choices helpful. You can find these on ECLKC within the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness Healthy Active Living resources. Activities like this are not only fun for you and your child, but they also give your child opportunities to practice and master new physical skills and skills of daily living. In this case, using a cup. Drinking from a cup is a complex physical skill that involves strength and coordination in hands and arms and coordination in the muscles of a child's lips, mouth, and tongue. They also expose your baby to language. The amount of adult language that young children hear, even as infants, predicts their vocabulary skills later on. It also exposes your baby to rhymes, which is part of an important early literacy skill called chronological awareness. The ability to make and use rhymes predicts children's literacy skills later in life. Activities like this are not only fun for you and your child, but they also expose your toddler or preschoolers to language, and the amount of adult language that young children hear, even in the first five years, predicts their vocabulary later on.

They expose your toddler or preschooler to rhymes, which is part of an important early literacy skill. The ability to make and use rhymes predicts children's literacy skills later on. They give your child a chance to think about science concepts, like where the milk goes when it soaks into the towel. And they encourage your child to build social skills, like cooperation and qualities like responsibility and helpfulness. You can also check out an initiative called I am Moving I am Learning.

The goals of I am Moving I am Learning include increasing the quantity and quality of physical activity, and improving healthy food choices for children every day. The I am Moving I am Learning tool is filled with quick and easy ideas for integrating movement, nutrition, and healthy habits into everyday life. It is available in two formats -- one for staff that visit families in the home and parents and one for classroom teachers and other caregivers. Staff that visit families in the home and parents discover a virtual world that includes places within the home as well as in the community. These staff members can use the tool with parents to share tips to help integrate learning into a family's daily routine with ease.

Parents can explore the tool on their own to gain ideas between home visitor visits. Places in the virtual world are intended to be areas where families regularly spend their time. This allows discussion around simple, fun activities families can do with their children.

The virtual home encourages discussion about oral health, fruits and vegetables, and helping with chores.