

## Meal Service Styles

### Pre-plated, Cafeteria, Family and Combination Style

Descriptions for pre-plated, cafeteria, family style and combination types of meal services are provided below. Meals may be served to participants using any one of the four types described.

**Pre-plated meal service** - This is a type of meal service where by all the food components of a meal (e.g. lunch - meat/meat alternate, fruits, vegetables, breads/grains and milk) are **served** to participants. Supervising staff pre-fill plates and glasses/cups with the minimum required portion size for all food components prior to the meal service.

**Cafeteria style** - This type of meal service is commonly found in **school settings**. Students are served the food components of their meal by food service staff as they proceed down the serving line. In some situations, a supervising adult may assist a student with his/her tray if they are unable to safely carry their tray to a cafeteria table.

Note: The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) regulations at 7 CFR 226.20(o) allows sponsors of the CACFP to follow the meal patterns used in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program if they, the CACFP sponsor, receives their meals from a school (e.g. the school provides vended meals to the child care center) or the CACFP participants eat their meals at a school.

**Family style meal service** - This type of meal service allows participants to serve themselves from common serving dishes of food placed on the table. Enough food must be brought to each table in order to provide the full required portion size for all participants and a supervising adult (if the adult intends to eat with the participants). The serving dishes are passed from one participant to another. Emphasis is placed on participants serving themselves. Adult supervision is necessary to provide assistance to young children and to set a good example. Supervising adults may pass bowls, steady containers or help where needed (e.g. hot or heavy food items).

Children should be encouraged to take the minimum required portion size for their age group of each food component. However, if a child is hesitant to serve themselves a particular food item the adult should encourage them to try a small portion/sample size. But if a child declines a food item the adult cannot force the child to take the food item. Please note that a child's meal may be claimed for reimbursement even if they decline/refuse to select one or more food items that are offered. (See the included U.S. Department of Agriculture instruction 783-9, rev. 2 on family style meal service). The required components must remain on the table during the meal service to accommodate participants who desire more food or want a food component that was previously declined.

**Combination style** – This type of meal service combines pre-plated and family style meal services. It can be used when certain food items of a meal cannot be easily or safely passed in common serving dishes from one participant to another when using a family style meal service.

The following example more clearly describes this type of meal service. A lunch containing a grilled cheese sandwich, chili (soup), green beans and milk is planned. Since the meal contains hot soup that is not easily/safely passed between participants the center may decide to use a combination style meal service for this particular meal. The adult pours the milk in the glasses and serves up the chili in bowls for the participants. Since the adult is “pre-plating” these two

food items, the minimum required portion size for each age group of participants must be served. The grilled cheese sandwiches and green beans are offered “family style” on a platter and/or in serving bowls. These food items are passed around the table so participants may serve themselves.

In summary, the portion size of food items that are pre-plated (by an adult) must meet the minimum required portion size for each age group served. The portion size of food items served “family style” is decided by the participant when they serve themselves.

## **Family Style Meal Service**

### **U.S. Department of Agriculture Instruction 783-9, Revision 2**

The CACFP has long been recognized for its nutritional goals of providing nutritious meals to children and helping them establish good eating habits at a young age. Family style meal service provides a further opportunity to enhance these goals by encouraging a pleasant eating environment that will support and promote meal time as a learning experience.

Family style is a type of meal service which allows children to serve themselves from common platters of food with assistance from supervising adults setting the example. In A Planning Guide for Food Service in Child Care Centers, the chapter, —Make Meal Time a Happy Time, provides guidance for family style meal service in the CACFP. Family style meal service encourages supervising adults to set a personal example and provide educational activities that are centered around foods. This approach allows children to identify, and be introduced to new foods, new tastes, and new menus, while developing a positive attitude toward nutritious foods, sharing in group eating situations, and developing good eating habits.

Unlike cafeteria lines, unitized meals and preset service, the family style method affords some latitude in the size of initial servings because replenishment is immediately available at each table. Even when a complete family style service is not possible or practical, it may be useful to offer a component or components in a family style manner particularly when smaller children are being served or when a new food item is being introduced. This latitude must be exercised in compliance with the following practices, at a minimum.

- 1) A sufficient amount of prepared food must be placed on each table to provide the full required portions (226.20) of each of the food components for all children at the table, and to accommodate supervising adult(s) if they eat with the children.
- 2) The family style meal service allows children to make choices in selecting foods and the size of the initial servings. Children should initially be offered the full required portion of each meal component.
- 3) During the course of the meal, it is the responsibility of the supervising adults to actively encourage each child to accept service of the full required portion for each food component of the meal pattern. For example, if a child initially refuses a food component, or initially does not accept the full required portion of a meal component, the supervising adult should offer the food component to the child again.
- 4) Institutions which use family style meal service may not claim second meals for reimbursement.
- 5) Meals served which follow the guidelines laid out in this instruction are eligible for reimbursement.