

MEALTIME

Routines are a sequence of actions regularly followed and repeated. The thought of daily routines to adults may not seem important but for children the simple task of having mealtime routines allows them to feel secure in their surroundings. Mealtime should be a relaxed and enjoyable time.

Mealtime Routines Help Children

- Learn new vocabulary and use their senses to explore new foods
- Practice social skills such as taking turns and sharing
- Develop self-care abilities and promote their sense of competence
- Have an opportunity to connect and engage in conversations with peers and adults
- Move from one transition to another with ease
- To become more independent
- Practice proper table manners and self-help skills



Facilitating A Positive Mealtime Routine

- Sit with the children and model conversation and manners. Ensure all children have an opportunity to share news about their day
- Be aware of seating of children (Some children may need to sit in the same spot every day, etc.). Ensure that seating is age appropriate and that there is sufficient space between children when sitting at the table. Children should be seated around a table so they can talk and see each other
- Provide opportunities for children to become more independent (pour their own drinks using a small pitcher, pass plates, serve themselves and clean own space after meals, etc.) Offer appropriate eating utensils based on the skill level of each child
- Use auditory and visual cues to assist children with mealtime transition (individual placemats, chimes, song, visual strip, etc.)
- Ensure that there is food available for picky eaters. Avoid a power struggle if a child does not like something on his/her plate. If eating is a medical concern for a child, invite parents to help problem-solve
- Allow children sufficient time to complete their meal without feeling rushed



- Nurture children’s healthy development by establishing a positive eating environment that is responsive to children’s cues of hunger and fullness (child may be hungry and need a snack before lunch is served, etc.)
- Ensure that there is a routine in place for the children who are finished eating (go to bathroom, get book, sit on carpet etc.)
- Offer snack as a choice during free play

Reflective Questions



- What does my mealtime routine look like?
- What strategies can I use for a child who does not like the provided meal?
- What can I change to make mealtime routines smoother?

Suggested Children’s Books

- Mealtime by Elizabeth Verdick
- Baby Touch and Feel: Mealtime by DK
- Manners At The Table by Carrie Finn
- How Do Dinosaurs Eat Their Food? by Jane Yolen
- I Really Like Slop by Mo Willems
- Chew, Chew, Chew, Gulp! by Lauren Thompson
- Rah, Rah, Radishes: A Vegetable Chant by April Pulley Sayre
- Mealtime by Sophia Day



After reading this reflective sheet, think about **“I wonder, I learned, I will...”**

This sheet was created by the All Kids Belong team based on their knowledge and experience, and is intended to assist individuals to identify areas for further thought.

For more information, contact us at akb@merrymount.on.ca or visit us at <http://www.merrymount.on.ca/all-kids-belong-program>