

Family Style Meal Service

What is Family Style?

What is family style? Family style meal service allows children to serve themselves from communal platters of food with assistance from supervising adults, if needed. This practice allows children to be introduced to new foods and new tastes, while developing a positive attitude toward healthy foods and good eating habits. Even when a complete family style meal service is not possible or practical, it may be useful to offer one component or multiple components in a family style manner.

Benefits of Family Style Meal Service

- Children learn and practice social and motor skills such as passing, sharing, pouring and scooping foods;
- Children may choose to take smaller portions of food and know they may take seconds if desired;
- Children are encouraged to try new foods by seeing other children eating them;
- Supervising adults can act as positive role models for the children by sitting at the same table and eating the same food;
- Supervising adults and children can enjoy pleasant conversations with one another;
- Creates a healthful eating environment that is responsive to children's hunger and fullness cues; and
- Creates an intimate, sharing, family-like environment.

Implementing Family Style

Serving meals family style is optional and may be used in any setting. If an institution chooses to serve meals family style, they must comply with the following practices (7 CFR 226.26(n)):

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 7 CFR 226.20(c)(1) and (2), for all children or adults at the table and to accommodate supervising adults if they wish to eat with the children.
2. Children must be allowed to serve the food components themselves, with the exception of fluids (such as milk and juice). During the course of the meal, it is the responsibility of the supervising adults to actively encourage each child to serve themselves the full required portion of each food component of the meal pattern. Supervising adults who choose to serve the fluids (including milk and juice) directly to the children must serve the required minimum quantity to each child. For example, children 3-5 years old must be served 6 fluid ounces of milk at breakfast, lunch and supper meals.



Differences Between Family Style Meal Service and Offer Versus Serve (OVS)

Family style meals and OVS are types of meal service and there are some key differences between the two.

1. Food components in family style meals are self-served by the child participant, while food components in OVS are pre-portioned or served directly by the provider or supervising adult.
2. In both meal services, children must be offered the minimum required serving sizes of each required meal component, however, in family style meals; a child does not need to take the full minimum required serving size of a food component to receive reimbursement. When a child does not take a food component or the full minimum serving size during family style meals, the supervising adult must encourage the child to serve themselves a food component or take the full minimum serving size. Alternatively, while the child or adult may decline some food items or components in OVS, they must take the full minimum serving size of the food components they choose in order for the meal to be reimbursable.