



WEEK 2

Family Meal Structure



WHAT WE'LL DO

This week is all about family meal structure. We know children thrive on predictability and structure. What does meal structure look like? We want to have a beginning, middle, and end with the meal occurring at the table with at least one adult eating alongside the child.

This week, we are going to try a family style meal. That means placing the cooked food into bowls on the table to be passed around amongst the family. Children as young as 2 can participate in passing around the food. This type of serving style allows toddlers and children to learn how much to eat and begin listening to their bodies' cues. There is also a language component. Asking for the passed dish allows them to learn to ask questions and use their language skills to communicate needs/wants around food.

Meals can be broken down into **3 parts**. If trying all three parts is too much, choose one part to try this week. When we have the Dinner Demonstration, we will serve the food family style. We recommend trying family style serving (the middle part of the meal) once before our dinner celebration. We will be utilizing the family style structure created by the feeding program SOS.

THE BEGINNING

Maybe your child needs a warning to stop playing before meals. A 3-5 minute timer may help. Once the timer goes off, guide your child to wash their hands.

For older children, involving in the table set up is helpful. Maybe your child puts out the silverware each meal or always gives each person a napkin. This can help cue the beginning of the meal.

Start with a table clear of non meal related items (toys, phones, IPADS, and the like removed). Make sure distractions are gone - turn off the TV.

If you choose to listen to some music, make sure it's a choice that still allows for all people to hear the same music (no earbuds or personal music systems), have conversation, and listen to each other.

Try this simple song to the tune of "Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush"

**This is the way we wash our hands
Wash our hands, wash our hands.
This is the way we wash our hands
Every family meal.**

AT A GLANCE

FAMILY MEALTIME CHALLENGES

- Week 1: Explore New Food
- **Week 2: Family Meal Structure**
- Week 3: Increase Family Bonds
- Week 4: Kids in the Kitchen
- Week 5: Pulling It All Together

DINNER DEMONSTRATION EVENTS

Late February or early March dates to be determined based upon final registration preferences of participants.





WEEK 2

Family Meal Structure



THE MIDDLE

Now it's time to move to the table and sit down. Each member (over the age of 2) eating the meal should begin with a plate free of food. Children under 2 can still participate, however the adult will help serve the child.

Put meal items in bowls on the table. A recommended structure includes 1 protein, 1 starch, and 1 fruit/vegetable. *Please make sure your child always has food they will eat at meals. This is not a time to try all new foods. We want your children to still eat!

Pass the food around the table and allow your children the opportunity to pick how much to put on their plate (little ones may need some guidance). If your child declines one of the foods, still try to allow your child to have an interaction with the food. Could they scoop the food onto your plate? Remember, interacting with food leads to adventurous eating.

Set a goal for the length of the meal. Can the family stay at the table for 5 minutes or perhaps 10 minutes? Keep your goal realistic - you can always continue to work up to longer lengths together at meals with time. Length of the meal should not create a battle.

ENDING THE MEAL

Begin the clean up process. If children are old enough, have them help bring plates and silverware to the kitchen. If not, can a parent help them wipe down their area? Perhaps pulling out a wet wipe and wiping down their placemat together can be done.

A few tips during the meal: If your child chooses something new from a bowl being passed, try to "play it cool." Overactions may lead to rejection of the food for a second bite.

Keeping it simple to 3 food items (protein, veggie/fruit, and starch) helps kids feel less overwhelmed by choices. Additionally, less is more. If you have a picky eater, a large plate of food can feel overwhelming. Starting with smaller portions actually increases oral intake!

If the emphasis is on the food, the child may be more stressed around meals. Try to focus on social interactions and conversation rather than food during meal times.

Try These Tips

- 1. Child trying a new food? Play it cool.** Overreaction can lead to rejection of the new food.
- 2. Keep it simple!** Three food items (protein, starch, and veggie/fruit) are all that's needed.
- 3. Focus on social interactions.** Turn attention away from the food and concentrate on the conversation for a less stressful meal.



Northwest
Education
Services

