

## **Best Practice #1: Model Healthy Eating Behaviors**

*Reasoning:* Positive role models can have great influence on children trying new foods and forming healthy eating habits. Children learn in different ways: through formal education, first-hand experiences, hands-on approaches and observation. Young children look up to adults and peers (usually older children) and often model behaviors such as eating. When adults eat the same foods as children and serve as role models they are sending the message “do as I do” instead of simply “do as I say.”





*Who and How:*

Adults can be positive role models by:


- Sitting with children at mealtime and sharing the same food;
- Serving meals community-style\* to give children the greatest opportunity for demonstrating independence and practicing learned behaviors;
- Discussing and teaching children about different foods, including a focus on healthy foods from different cultures and traditions;
- Trying new foods with the children;
- Avoiding negative facial expressions, body language or verbal cues in regard to the food being served;

- Talking with children about food preferences and why they may not be trying a particular food (i.e., “I tried this already and I really like it. You should try it and see if you like it too!”); and
- Being conscious of their own behaviors to ensure that they are modeling what is intended.

Peers can also serve as positive role models. Children like to do what their friends are doing and often imitate one another. Adults can encourage positive role modeling among peers by:

- Identifying who the more adventurous eaters are and offering new foods to them first.





Likewise, identify who the pickiest eaters are and offer new foods to them after the adventurous eaters have had a chance to try them;

- Encouraging children to talk about the foods – texture, taste, color, etc. – at mealtime;
- Sitting picky eaters next to or across from those who eat a variety of foods, so they can observe and learn to accept new foods; and
- Be persistent and consistent about proper mealtime behavior, thus encouraging a positive mealtime environment.

\* A community-style meal (sometimes referred to as “family-style”) is characterized by: children serving

themselves from a common serving dish; children passing the serving dishes from person to person; children taking as much or as little food as they desire from the serving dishes; and adults supervising and assisting children only when help is requested by the child.

