Nutrition in the Classroom

Section 1: Module 2
What We Will Learn

• Supporting healthy eating in the classroom
• Supporting choosy and slow eaters
• Linking classroom activities to nutrition
• Providing parents with nutrition information
• Improving foods served at celebrations
• Including nutrition everyday classroom experiences
Supporting Healthy Eating

Reasons to eat together
- Model healthy eating behaviors
- Socialization skills are practice
- Motor skills are developed

Staff should
- Discuss the nutritional benefits of food
- Encourage children to participate in the meal or snack, even if they choose not to eat
Supporting Healthy Eating

Eating together

- Develops food preferences.
- Provides opportunity to learn flavors, smells, textures and a variety of foods

Staff

- Encourage children to set table and clean up
- Verbally encourage children to serve themselves
- Provide containers and scoops sized for children
- Teach reasonable portion sizes and self-regulation of food intake
Supporting Healthy Eating

Division of Responsibility

- Head Start decides what, when and where to eat
- Children decide whether to eat and how much

Staff

- Avoid power struggles relating to food
- Encourage children to try new foods
- Do not use food as a reward or punishment
Supporting Healthy Eating

Children learn about foods through

• formal education,
• first-hand experiences,
• hands-on approaches and
• observation

A positive role model

• Sends the message “do as I do”
• Eats and drinks foods on the daily menu
• Avoids negative facial expressions, body language or verbal cues to the food
• Limits children seeing them eat high fat, sweet or salty snacks, or sugary beverages
Supporting Healthy Eating

Positive Reinforcement Study

- ½ of the families were counseled to eat more fruit and vegetables
- ½ of families were counseled to eat less fat and sugar
- Those counseled to eat more fruit and vegetables ate a healthier diet than those told not to eat fat and sugar

Staff

- Encourage eating healthy
Supporting Healthy Eating

**Meal time can**
- Reinforce the learning of colors
- Teach kids to categorize vegetables
- Increase nutrition knowledge

**Staff**
- Talk about the color, shape, size of the foods served
  - “steamed carrots are my favorite orange vegetable”
- Discuss the health benefits of the food
  - “I eat carrots to help me see better.”
Slow & Choosy Eaters

Choosy Eater
• Neophobia
  – fear of new food (new things)
• Food Jags
  – only want to eat one food
  – rarely last long enough to be harmful

Reduce Fear of New Foods
• A food must be tasted up to a dozen times before it becomes familiar
• Offer the food regularly
• Offer a variety of foods
Slow & Choosy Eaters

Support the Choosy Eater

- Sit the choosy eater with adventurous eaters
- Suggest trying 1-2 tablespoon of the food
- Praise children for tasting new foods
- Allow children to stop eating
  - When they say they are full
  - When there is still food left on the plate
- Work with children to select reasonable portion sizes
Slow & Choosy Eaters

Teach about Food
- Flavors
- Smell
- Textures
- Colors
  - Canned pineapple is tangy
  - Carrots are crunchy
  - Broccoli is green
  - Milk is smooth and white.

Eating Takes Time
- Allow children to eat at their own pace
- Sit slower eaters together
- Staff stays with the children
- Activities after meals do not require group participation
Nutrition Education

Life Goal:
To establish a lifetime of healthy eating and physical activity habits

Classroom Goal:
To expect that nutrition and activity are a regular and essential part of each day

Accomplish by:
• Integrating nutrition and physical activity into all curricula and domains of learning
• Repeatedly teach to normalize healthy eating and physical activity
Nutrition Education

Increase Food Curiosity

- Teach a lesson about the new food
- For pineapple, read a book about characters in Hawaii
- Ask children questions
  - Have you ever eaten fresh or canned pineapple?
  - Is pineapple a fruit or a vegetable?
  - Does pineapple grow in Alaska?
  - Who would like to try eating pineapple at lunch?
- Conduct taste tests
Nutrition Education

Build Excitement

• Invite an elder to tell a story of fishing
• Show fishing gear and fillet a fish
• Place traditional-style clothing in dramatic play area
• Make decorations using traditional styles
• Play traditional music
• Read a book about traditional foods
• Practice making a food.
  – For Mexican food, roll out tortillas
  – For Italian food, use the pasta maker
  – For Native Alaskan food, sort and wash blueberries
Nutrition Education

Helping Prepare Foods

- Include the entire classroom
- Small groups in the kitchen
- Share how food looks, smells, and tastes before and after it is cooked
  - broccoli changes shades of green and is no longer crunchy
  - pasta noodles do not smell much before cooking
  - toast becomes brown and crunchy
Nutrition Education

Food Demonstrations
• Increase familiarity with food
• Introduce new healthy foods to children
• Increase understanding of cooking
• Begin to develop skills and interest in food preparation

Staff
• Use meal preparation to teach numbers, colors, textures, patterns and sequencing
Nutrition Education

Exploring Foods
- Allow children to play with food before eating

Make Vegetable Puppets
- Place a popsicle stick into the bottom of a peeled carrot
- Use peanut butter as glue
- Affix raisins for eyes and nose
- Place a slice of celery for the mouth
- Use parsley sprigs for the hair
- Cut green beans in half for arms & legs
Physical Activity and Nutrition for Alaska’s Kids

**EATING OUR WORDS**

- **Stone Soup**  
  Marcia Brown

- **Bread, Bread, Bread:**  
  *Foods of the World*  
  Ann Morris

- **Lunch**  
  Denise Fleming

- **Pancakes, Pancakes!**  
  Eric Carle

- **We Like to Nurse**  
  Chia Martin

- **Picky Nicky**  
  Cathy East Dubowski

- **Walter the Baker**  
  Eric Carle

- **Peanut Butter and Jelly:**  
  A Play Rhyme  
  Nadine Westcott

- Display and read books about healthy eating
- Weave a theme through the entire day or week
- Plan activities that are learned in the book
Nutrition Education

Food Sources
- Read books about where food comes from
- Grow edible plants in the classroom
- When possible, have a garden at the center or participate in a community garden

Take a Field Trip
- Visit a local gardener or person with farm animals
- Integrate the learning of the garden or farm field trips into the curriculum
  - Visit the garden several times throughout the year
- Integrate the learning of the field trips into the curriculum
  - Teach why certain foods grow in Alaska’s climate
- Serve the foods seen at the garden or farm
Nutrition Education

Traditional Food

- Take field trips to pick wild foods
- Invite a local hunter to share stories
- Follow Alaska Food Code regulations and serve wild blueberries, fiddleheads, beach asparagus, and wild game meats
Nutrition Education

Decorate the Classroom

• Stock the creative play area with healthy food models and empty boxes of healthy food
• Decorate walls with posters of healthy food
• Use pictures of vegetables to help teach letters and numbers
• Design name tags with the child’s favorite fruit
• Make placemats that show a plate with reasonable child sized portions
Parent Nutrition Education

Assign Healthy Homework

- Eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables over the weekend
- Be active for at least 30 minutes each day
- Help your parents in the kitchen
- Sleep more than 8 hours on Saturday night
- Eat breakfast each morning

Teachers must be careful to assign homework that is realistic for the children.
Parent Nutrition Education

Menus and Newsletters

- Share classroom nutrition activities
- Include healthy recipes
- Write menus to emphasize nutrition messages such as
  - low-fat milk
  - whole wheat rolls
  - vitamin A rich sweet potatoes

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Healthful Eating For Your Family

**Make Healthy Choices**
Healthy choices that fit your lifestyle can help you do the things you want to do. Here are some easy steps you can take. Add your own ideas!

**Be Realistic:** Make small changes over time in what you eat and in the level of activity you do. After all, small steps work better than giant leaps. You can:
- Add one more fruit or vegetable to family meals this week. Work up to five a day.

**Be Sensible:** Enjoy all foods, just don’t overdo it. You can:
- Enjoy one ice cream scoop, not two.

*Your idea:*
Celebrations

Provide a Consistent Healthy Food Message

- Promotes a positive learning environment

Staff

- Plan healthy celebrations
- Shift the focus from food to the event
- Replace food with a variety of activities, games and crafts
- If food is served, make it healthy and part of the regular meal or snack
- Establish food policy or nutrition guidance regarding celebrations
Celebrations

Importance of Celebrations Policy or Nutrition Guidance

- Healthy kids learn better
- Provides consistent messages about healthy behaviors
- Supports classroom health lessons
- Promotes positive lifestyle choices
Celebrations

Performance Standards Requirement

- Development and adoption to involve parents, community members, Head Start staff and food service staff

The policy should

- Prohibit high sugar foods
- Reduce high trans fat and high fat foods
Establish Healthy Eating Habits

Head Start Staff

- Increase exposure to foods
  - Variety of teaching methods
  - Support strategies
- Providing children
  - Hands-on experiences
  - Formal education
  - Modeling of healthy eating
  - Proper support
  - Consistent messages
- Educating parents