

Session Four - Let Children Serve Themselves

Core Message

Let them learn by serving themselves. Let your kids serve themselves at dinner.
Teach them to take a small amount at first. They can get more if they are still hungry.

Background Information

During meals, parents should decide **what, when, and where** foods are offered, while children should decide **whether and how much** to eat.¹ Letting children serve themselves does not necessarily mean that children should take food from a serving dish themselves. Young children may not have the motor skills to do this. Rather, parents can place food on a child's plate, but allow the child to tell them how much to serve. Parents should also allow children to stop eating when they are full, rather than pressuring them to continue eating after reaching satiation.

Research suggests that infants and very young children have the ability to self-regulate the amount of food they consume when given the opportunity.²⁻¹¹ While intake at specific meals may be erratic, caloric intake over the course of the day is relatively well regulated. However, child feeding practices (i.e., when parents are not responsive to child feeding cues) may disrupt children's abilities to eat when they are hungry and stop eating when they are full.^{2, 12-14}

Differences in children's abilities to self-regulate energy intake appear in preschoolers, and these differences are even more pronounced in older children.¹⁵⁻¹⁸ The amount and way that food is provided can also make a difference. Parents may serve larger portions than their children can consume and then use pressure or coercion to get their children to eat "enough." Some research has shown that simply by serving large portions, parents may be influencing their children to eat more.¹⁹⁻²¹

Sources for Additional Information*

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This information is adapted from the USDA website, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/corenutritionmessages/default.html>

Session Overview

During this session, participants will discover the importance of allowing their children to decide how much to eat. Participants will learn that because children are born with the ability to regulate the amount of food they eat, parents do not need to tell them how much to eat.

*These are not to be distributed to participants.

Dialogue Learning Tips

- Use open questions.
- Time management is important in maintaining learner participation and energy. After asking an open question, let participants know that you will give them a few minutes for discussion. Let them know when the discussion time is almost up, and then end the discussion at the time you had planned.
- After asking a question:
 - Wait five seconds before listening to responses. This will allow all participants time to gather their thoughts and respond.
 - Allow participants to volunteer answers. Do not call on participants.
 - Affirm participants' answers. Use their names, thank them for contributing, and tell them why you are thanking them. For example, "**Thank you for sharing Martha. I imagine most of us can relate to what you said.**"
 - Avoid praising participants' responses, (e.g., avoid saying "good" or "excellent").
- Ask follow-up questions to show you are listening to participants' responses.

Time Required for Session: 45 minutes

PREPARATION

Bring with you:

- Name tags (one for each participant)
- Colorful markers or pens (to write on the name tags)
- The session poster
- Copies of the participant handout
- The educator handout
- Sign-in sheets
- A watch or clock so that you can effectively manage time
- Ingredients for Fruit Kabobs with Yogurt Dip
- Bowls or plates for the fruit and yogurt
- Plates for participants to eat from
- Napkins
- Glasses
- Water
- Paper towels
- Hand wipes or hand sanitizer
- Cutting boards
- Knives
- A spoon
- Dish soap
- Sponge

Before the participants arrive:

- Display the poster for this session in the room.
- Arrange the tables and chairs so that all participants will be able to see you and each other. Make sure there is nothing (such as a desk) between you and the participants. If there is a round table in the room that will fit everyone, plan to use that table.
- Put name tags, markers, and the sign-in sheet in the middle of the table or at the front of the room.
- Put one copy of the handout at each participant's seat.
- Make a name tag for yourself, and put it on your shirt where participants will be able to see it.

WELCOME and OVERVIEW (5 minutes)

Start by greeting participants as they walk in the door. Greet them with a smile and say hello; use their names if you remember them from last session. Ask them to make a name tag and take a seat.

Once everyone has arrived, welcome them to the class.

Remind them that last time you talked about how important (and how much fun) it is for them to eat with their children.

Tell them that today you are going to discuss why children should serve themselves. Point to the poster and read it aloud.

LESSON (35 minutes)

Anchor (5 minutes)

Have participants talk with the person sitting next to them about how decisions are made about their child's eating. Have them discuss who decides what their child eats, when their child eats, and how much their child eats.

Give participants three minutes to discuss.

Bring the group back together and ask for participants to share how decisions about their child's eating are made. Listen to and affirm a few participants' responses.

Add (10 minutes)

Tell participants that there are many ideas about how to feed children, and that some of the information that you share today may be new to them.

Review the material on the front of the handout. Emphasize the rule of thumb that parents should decide **what, when, and where** foods are offered, and let their children decide **whether** and **how much** to eat.

Use the Discussion Questions on the educator handout to encourage the participants to talk about letting their children serve themselves.

Apply (15 minutes)

Tell participants that you are going to make Fruit Kabobs with Yogurt Dip. Tell them that this is a fun snack that children can help make.

Read over the recipe for Fruit Kabobs with Yogurt Dip as a group.

Have participants wash their hands. Encourage participants to help make the fruit kabobs. For example, one person can cut up the fruit while another puts the yogurt in a bowl. Allow the participants to prepare and taste fruit kabobs.

While participants are eating the fruit kabobs ask them, **“How can your children help you make the kabobs?”** Listen to and affirm three or four participants’ answers.

Encourage participants to try this recipe with their children in the next week. Tell them to allow their children to decide how much and which fruits to put on their kabobs. Suggest that participants be creative with the kinds of fruit they use.

Away (5 minutes)

Ask participants to use the “Goal Setting” section on the back of the handout to write down two meals that they can serve family style in the next week. Remind them that serving meals family style allows their children to decide how much they want to eat.

CLOSER (5 minutes)

Refer back to the poster and remind participants that it is important to provide healthy foods at each meal, and then allow children to decide how much to eat.

Suggest to participants that:

- **They avoid comments about how much or which foods a child is eating.**
- **If a child doesn’t want to eat when the rest of the family is eating, she should sit with the family while everyone else eats. Then the parent can make the food she would have eaten during the meal available later, if she is hungry. She should not be given a snack if she is hungry later.**

Thank the participants for coming and tell them when and where the next session will be held. As participants leave, say goodbye to them by name. Wait to leave until all of the participants have left.

FOLLOW-UP (after the session)

Text or Email Messages

Text or email messages can be sent to your participants to reinforce the main points of this session and remind them about the next session. The table below outlines approximately when your participants will receive the messages based on the frequency of your classes.

If you have this much time between sessions	Reinforcement message 1 will be sent:	Reinforcement message 2 will be sent:	Reinforcement message 3 will be sent:	Reinforcement message 4 will be sent:	Reminder messages will be sent:
One Week	Two days after the session	N/A	N/A	N/A	Five days after the session (two days before the next session)
Two Weeks	Two days after the session	Nine days after the session	N/A	N/A	Twelve days after the session (two days before the next session)
Three Weeks	Two days after the session	Nine days after the session	Seventeen days after the session	N/A	Nineteen days after the session (two days before the next session)
Four Weeks	Two days after the session	Nine days after the session	Seventeen days after the session	Twenty four days after the session	Twenty six days after the session (two days before the next session)

Sample Reinforcement Messages For Session 4

- * Hi! You decide what, when, & where your kids eat & they decide how much. Feeding 4 Healthy Eating (Reply "STOP" to quit receiving texts)
- * Hi [first name]! Tried the fruit kabobs at home? Let your children decide how much fruit to put on their kabob. Feeding 4 Healthy Eating
- * Hi! Let your kids decide how much to eat tonight; they will stop when they are full. Feeding 4 Healthy Eating (Reply "STOP" to quit receiving texts)
- * Hi! Kids are born knowing how much to eat. They will eat when they are hungry & stop when they are full on their own. Feeding 4 Healthy Eating
- * Hi! At dinner start with a small portion & let your child decide how much to eat. Feeding 4 Healthy Eating (Reply "STOP" to quit receiving texts)

Reminder Message

- * Hi! Looking forward to seeing you at the next session: [DATE, TIME, and LOCATION]. Feeding 4 Healthy Eating (Reply "STOP" to quit receiving texts)

Session Four: Letting Your Children Serve Themselves *Sign-In Sheet*

Date:

As part of the **Feeding for Healthy Eating** program you can receive messages about feeding your young child.

We will send you 1–2 messages a week. These messages will give you reminders about what we talked about in class and suggestions for how to do the things that we talked about in class. We will also remind you when the next class will be held.

You can sign up for text messages or email messages.

To sign up for the text messages, **write your cell phone number below**. Only sign up for the text messages if you have an unlimited text message plan. You will be charged your standard rate for these messages.

Name: _____

Cell phone number: _____

To sign up for the email messages, **write your email address below**.

Email address: _____

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To sign up for the email messages, **write your email address below**.

Email address: _____



Letting Your Children Serve Themselves

- **Let them learn by serving themselves.**
- **Let your kids serve themselves at meals.**
- **Teach them to take a small amount at first.**
- **They can get more if they are still hungry.**

A Good Rule: You decide what, when, and where foods are offered and let your children decide whether and how much to eat.

Children are born knowing how much to eat.

- You don't need to tell them how much to eat.
- They will eat when they are hungry and stop eating when they are full, all on their own.
- Listen to your child. If she says she's full, don't force her to eat more or clean her plate.

When children are given large amounts of food and encouraged to finish it, they cannot stop eating when their bodies tell them they are full. Over time, they may learn to ignore when their bodies tell them that they are full and eat more than they need to.

Keep in mind what your child eats over time. Meals and healthy snacks give children several chances to eat a variety of foods. If your child eats only a little or nothing at one meal, don't worry. He'll make up for it with other meals and snacks

Letting children serve themselves means allowing them to decide what to eat from the healthy options you provide and allowing them to decide how much to eat. Young children may not be able to put food on their own plates. Even if you are serving them, allow them to decide how much is put on their plate.

What's a preschooler sized serving?



1/4 cup vegetable



1/4 cup fruit



1/4 cup cooked pasta or rice



1/3 cup dry cereal

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Tips for letting children serve themselves

- Avoid comments about how much food or which foods a child is eating.
- If your child doesn't want to eat when the rest of the family is eating, have her sit with the family while everyone else eats. Make the food she would have eaten during the meal available later if she is hungry. Avoid giving her treats or snacks later.

Fruit Kabobs with Yogurt Dip

Makes a great afternoon snack to share with your child.

Ingredients

- ½ watermelon cut into chunks
- ½ pineapple cut into chunks or 1 20oz can pineapple chunks in 100% juice
- 1 cup red seedless grapes
- 1 cup strawberries, stemmed
- 16 wooden skewers, 6 inches long
- 1 cup low-fat yogurt vanilla or strawberry

Directions

1. Allow your children to select several fruit chunks and put them on a skewer.
2. Place low-fat light strawberry yogurt in bowl. Dip the fruit skewer in the yogurt.



Serves: 8

Nutritional Information per Serving
Calories: 210
Total Fat: 1g
Saturated Fat: 0g

Goal Setting

**What are two meals that you can serve family style in the next week?
Serving meals family style allows your children to decide how much they want to eat.**

Letting Your Children Serve Themselves

1 ANCHOR Activity
Have participants talk with the person sitting next to them about how decisions are made about their child's eating. Have them discuss who decides what their child eats, when their child eats, and how much their child eats.

ADD Activity Read through the handout with the participants.

- Let them learn by serving themselves.
- Let your kids serve themselves at dinner.
- Teach them to take a small amount at first.
- They can get more if they are still hungry.

A Good Rule: You decide what, when, and where foods are offered and let your children decide whether and how much to eat.

1

Children are born knowing how much to eat.

- You don't need to tell them how much to eat.
- They will eat when they are hungry and stop eating when they are full, all on their own.
- Listen to your child. If she says she's full, don't ask her to eat more or clean her plate.

2

2 You can clarify that young children may not be able to put their own food on their plate, but they should be allowed to eat as much or as little as they want and should not be encouraged to eat more than they want.

Discussion Questions: Have you tried allowing your children to select which foods from several healthy options they eat? How has that worked?



When children are given large amounts of food and encouraged to finish it, they cannot stop eating when their bodies tell them they are full. Over time, they may learn to ignore when their bodies tell them that they are full and eat more than they need to.

Keep in mind what your child eats over time. Meals and healthy snacks give children several chances to eat a variety of foods. If your child eats only a little or nothing at one meal, don't worry. He'll make up for it with other meals and snacks

What's a preschooler sized serving?



1/4 cup vegetable



1/3 cup dry cereal



1/4 cup cooked pasta or rice



1/4 cup fruit

Letting children serve themselves means allowing them to decide what to eat from the healthy options you provide and allowing them to decide how much to eat. Young children may not be able to put food on their own plates. Even if you are serving them, allow them to decide how much is put on their plate.

3

3 Discussion Questions: What are some things you can do to allow your child to decide how much to eat without wasting food? What has worked for you in the past? (For example, giving two children half an apple each, rather than giving each child a whole apple).



4 APPLY
Have participants make and taste the fruit kabobs.

Discussion Question: How can your children help make the kabobs?



AWAY
Ask participants to use the "Goal Setting" section on the back of the handout to write down two meals that they can serve family style in the next week. Remind them that serving meals family style allows their children to decide how much they want to eat.

Suggest to participants that:

- They avoid comments about how much or which foods a child is eating.
- If your child doesn't want to eat when the rest of the family is eating, have her sit with the family while everyone else eats. Make the food she would have eaten during the meal available later if she is hungry.

TAKE AWAY Message: It's important to let children decide when and how much to eat from the healthy options you provide.

Talking points:

For parents who are worried their children will not eat enough if their children decide how much they eat.

- Tell them it's natural for parents to worry about their preschoolers' eating habits. Suggest that they offer healthy foods and let their child choose from them. They'll be more likely to enjoy meal time and eat enough, so everyone is happier. (adapted from the 2012 Core Nutrition Messages)
- If their children refuse to eat the food they have prepared parents can talk about the sensory qualities of the food (e.g. "This is kiwi fruit, it's sweet like a strawberry.") or ask the child questions about his/her preferences (e.g. "Do you like this? Which one is your favorite? Everybody likes different foods, don't they?") These approaches will encourage the child to try the food without pressuring them to eat and will allow the child to feel like she/he is able to choose what she/he eats. (adapted from Phrases that Help and Hinder)

For parents who are worried that their children will waste food if they are allowed to decide how much to eat.

- Tell them to give their child a small portion to start and let their child have more if they ask for more. They do not have to let their child place food on their own plate.

Tips for letting children serve themselves

- Avoid comments about how much food or which foods a child is eating.
- If your child doesn't want to eat when the rest of the family is eating, have her sit with the family while everyone else eats. Make the food she would have eaten during the meal available later if she is hungry. Avoid giving her treats or snacks later.

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Serves: 8

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Calories: 210
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Saturated Fat: 0g

Goal Setting

**What are two meals that you can serve family style in the next week?
Serving meals family style allows your children to decide how much they want to eat.**

Let them learn by serving themselves.



**Let your
kids serve
themselves
at meals.**



**Teach them to take a small amount at first.
They can get more if they are still hungry.**

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