Planning a meal together can be a fun learning opportunity while bringing your family closer together. Who better to reinforce healthy eating with your child than their first teacher, YOU!

**PLANNING YOUR MEAL**

- Create a list of meals for the week with your child by looking through your cupboards, refrigerator, freezer, recipe books, magazines, or weekly grocery ads.
- Once you have your menu planned, encourage your child to add items to a shopping list.
- Start by having your child write the sound/letter they hear at the beginning of each item or copy the name from the product label.

**PREPARING YOUR MEAL**

Encourage your child to help prepare the family meals. Children are more likely to eat foods when involved in the cooking process.

- Before getting started, make washing hands fun! Sing the following song to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

  **Wash, wash, wash your hands**
  **Wash them every day,**
  **Get the front and the back**
  **Wash the germs away!**

- Strengthening fine motor skills prepares your child for the task of writing. Incorporate the following skills in the cooking process:
  
  *Peeling, scrubbing, mashing, scooping, cutting, pouring, measuring, mixing, and spreading the ingredients.*
SHARING A MEAL

LITERACY STRATEGIES

SETTLING THE TABLE
Rhyming can be fun while getting the chore done! Provide a word that rhymes with an item needed to set the table.

- Place five things on the table that rhyme with dates. (plates)
- Above the plates, put something that rhymes with pups. (cups)
- Next to the plate, place something that rhymes with pumpkin. (napkin)
- On top of the napkin, set something that rhymes with moon. (spoon)

MEALTIME CONVERSATIONS
You can make mealtimes even more special by talking with and listening to your child. Engaging in meaningful conversations expands their vocabulary and knowledge.

Mealtime:
- Ask your child to talk about how they helped plan and prepare the meal.
- Describe the foods on your plate. Use as many descriptive words as possible. (Example: Tomatoes—red, juicy, round, soft…)
- Discuss where the foods came from: animal, plant, vine, tree, etc.

School Day:
- Tell me about the best part of your day.
- Tell me about a book your teacher read today.
- Tell me about a job or responsibility you had at school.
- Tell me about a friend from school.

Open-Ended:
- What would you like to do this weekend?
- What is your favorite memory?
- Tell me about something you can do really well.
- Tell me about something you would like to learn.

CLEAN-UP
Encourage your child to take part in the clean-up process. Establishing a clean-up routine is important in developing responsibilities and self-help skills. Reinforce the skills your child is learning in school by playing these clean-up games:

- When clearing the table, count the syllables in each item that you pick-up. 
  Example: (napkin = 2 syllables = nap-kin)

- While washing the dishes, write letters in the soap bubbles.
  Examples: child’s name, letter cluster

- While putting left-overs away, name the beginning sound and letter of each food.
  Example: peas /p/

- As your child wipes the table and countertops, see if they can finish cleaning before they finish singing an alphabet song. (ABC, ELLM Alphabet, Jack Hartman’s ABC Disco, etc.)
Sharing meals together can be a very rewarding experience for you and your family. A little preparation can go a long way. Here are some fun and educational ways to use social and emotional strategies to help improve your dining experience.

**PLANNING YOUR MEAL**

- Read “Growing Vegetable Soup” by Louis Ehlert with your child to help prepare for your upcoming meal.
- Talk about the purpose of your meal. Examples: “Today we are going to get all the ingredients together to make vegetable soup.”
- What ingredients do you think we will need? Let’s make a list.
- Talk about the rules in the kitchen and at the dining table.

**RULES IN THE KITCHEN**

- **Knives** – Let an adult use all sharp knives.
- **Stove, Hot items** – Explain to your child the danger of burns from a hot stove and other items.
- **Listening Ears** – Explain to your child the importance of using listening ears and following directions while cooking in the kitchen.
- **Kind Words, Helpful Hands** – Model for your child how to use kind words and helpful hands while preparing food. Remember to keep the experience fun for all!
MIND YOUR MANNERS AT THE TABLE

- Wash your hands – use soap and warm water.
- Sit calmly – wait for everyone.
- Napkin/Utensil – place your napkin on your lap and use the appropriate utensil to eat.
- Use please, thank you, and excuse me.
- Conversation – keep topics positive – discuss the shape, color, smell, and taste of the foods you are eating. Other topics can include your child’s interests.
- Model healthy eating – Head Start recommends letting your child decide whether to eat, what to eat, and how much to eat – remember it may take 10-15 times before your child will accept a new food.
- “Getting out of your chair during a meal means you are finished with eating” and take away her plate. Do not allow snacks after the meal. Your child will not starve between meals and will learn that mealtimes is the time to eat. She will soon get the message that she must stay in her chair and eat during meals.
- Teaching your child mealtime expectations and consistently supporting her as she learns them will take time, but will make mealtimes more pleasant for everyone and is well worth the effort.

RECIPE: VEGETABLE SOUP

INGREDIENTS
- 1 onion
- 2 potatoes
- 4 stalks of celery
- 5 carrots
- 3 tomatoes
- 6 cups chicken broth
- salt, pepper, garlic, and oregano to taste
- Optional – chopped chicken breast, pasta noodles (colored or alphabet)

DIRECTIONS
- Cut vegetables
- Combine chicken broth and all ingredients into a large pot
- Cook on medium-log heat until vegetables are tender and to your liking

CATCH YOUR CHILD BEING GOOD

- I noticed you used your inside voice at the table.
- Thank you for helping me cook the meal. It is more fun when we work together!
- I like the way you tried a bite of something new. Even though you didn’t like it this time, we can try it again!
- You did a great job using your manners at the table! Thank you for asking me to pass you the bowl.

DEVELOP RESPONSIBILITY, COOPERATION, AND INDEPENDENCE

Your preschooler can:
- Help choose vegetables at the store
- Help measure ingredients
- Set the table
- Help clean up after the meal
SETTING THE TABLE
Ask your child to help you set the table and teach him or her some positional words. Your child will also learn about counting.

- “How many people will be eating with us today?” Help your child make a list of people.
- “What items will we need on the table?” Ask your child how many napkins, utensils, dishes, etc. will you need and have him or her count out that many.
- As your child sets the table, use positional words such as “next to, above, in front of, behind, etc. The fork goes to the left, the spoon on the right, the napkin on the left under the fork.

LET’S MEASURE!
Cooking a meal together is a good time to learn vocabulary about measurement. As you go through the recipe, discuss cups, teaspoons, tablespoons, more and less. Your child can help measure and add ingredients to the bowl.

- “The recipe says we need 2 cups of flour. Can you measure out 2 cups and add it to the bowl? Great job!”

More strategies on the other side of this page.
SHARING A MEAL

NUTRITION
Start teaching your child about how to make healthy food choices. Children should eat 5 servings of fruit and vegetables a day and 0 sugary beverages. Replace soda, sports drinks, and even 100% fruit juice with milk or water! Model healthy eating and try to get 15-30 minutes of outside activity daily with your child.

Have your child cut out pictures from flyers of healthy and unhealthy foods to make an art collage.

TECH CONNECTION
Visit Starfall to find math songs, counting games, addition/subtraction, and geometry activities. www.starfall.com

Visit the Safe and Health Children's Coalition to find healthy eating tips, exercises, and more! www.safehealthychildren.org

RECIPES: BREAKFAST EGG CUP

INGREDIENTS
- 1 – cooking spray
- 6 large – egg
- 1/4 cup – milk
- 1/8 teaspoon – salt
- 1/8 teaspoon – black pepper, ground
- Optional toppings – ham, turkey bacon, peppers, spinach, cheese

DIRECTIONS
1. Spray a muffin tin with cooking spray and set aside. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Whisk the eggs and milk together in a bowl. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Add chopped toppings.
4. Fill muffin cups 3/4 full and bake for 20-25 minutes until centers are set and no longer runny.
5. Allow to cool slightly before serving.

SNACK TIME
- Goldfish Story Problems – have your child count out 10 goldfish or other small healthy snack item. As your child eats, talk about less than and subtraction. If your child has eaten 5 goldfish, ask him or her how many are left.
- Pretzel Shapes – using small pretzel sticks, have your child construct different shapes. Squares, rectangles, triangles, and stars. Talk about how many pretzels you need to make each shape.
- Carrot Stick Letters – using carrot sticks, have your child make different letters. Try to write his or her whole name.