Creating a Comfortable Cafeteria Model Program

Week #6 Lesson Plan: Let’s Make Friends and Healthy Food Choices!

**Theme:** Students sample healthy fruits and vegetables and discuss why it is important to eat a variety of fresh foods.

Eating lunch in the cafeteria exposes students to foods that may not be available or served at home. It is important for students to be open to trying a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.

**Goals:**
1) Students have an opportunity to taste a variety of healthy fruits and vegetables.
2) Supervisors learn positive strategies for encouraging students to try healthy foods without being forceful or demanding.
3) Closure. Celebrate the last Comfortable Cafeteria session; commit to sustainability – keeping a comfortable cafeteria.

**Materials:**
- Fruits/Vegetables (bring in a variety such as fresh spinach, red pepper strips, pears, grapes)
- Plates
- Poster Board, marker, tape
- Utensils for serving

**Handouts for Supervisors & Teachers:**
  - Visit the Food Friends website at [www.foodfriends.org](http://www.foodfriends.org) for further resources and ideas.
- Visit [www.nourishinteractive.com](http://www.nourishinteractive.com) for free kid-friendly printables.
  - Kid’s Food Group Chart (1-page handout)
  - Kid’s Service Size Tips (1-page handout)

**Action steps for occupational therapist (OT) and other staff leading the program. BEFORE Week #5’s session:**
1) If your school has a dietician/nutritionist, contact and invite her/him in advance to be a ‘Special Guest’ and to help facilitate this last session. If there is no dietician, find the school’s health educator and include him/her in the preparations and session.
2) Get ready to purchase fruits and vegetables. Count the number of table and students.
3) Prepare the fruits and vegetables: Examples of fruits include: blueberries, pineapple, cantaloupe and kiwi. Examples of vegetables include: different colored peppers, snap peas, spinach and spring mix greens. Hummus can be used as a dip.
4) Put the fruits and vegetable on a plate or tray to allow for easy serving.
5) Place trays of fruits and vegetables on tables.
6) Hang poster board in cafeteria for discussion.

DURING Week #6's Cafeteria Session – The OT is present during lunch and leads a discussion & experiential activity about healthy eating and trying new foods. Co-lead this session with the school’s dietician/nutritionist or health educator.

1) Review the theme from last week. “We’ve been talking about making new friends, getting to know friends better and how foods and smells can change the way we feel. Raise your hand if you met a new friend or got to know someone better last week.” Ask if students tried smelling or tasting something new. Write the answers on the poster board. Then ask- “How did you feel? Did you like it or not?” Remind them that everyone experiences sensory input differently and to respect these differences in others.

2) Tell students that, “Today we are going to taste a small rainbow of healthy fruits and vegetables. There are so many to choose from. We have placed tasting plates on your table. Try something new or different that you have not eaten before. Did you know that sometimes it takes trying a new food 10 times before you begin to like it? The more colorful the natural food you eat, the more nutritionally diverse it is. Many of these fruits and vegetable are from different parts of the world.”

Supervisor suggestions/guidelines for encouraging students to try new foods:
- Keep it positive. Encourage tasting; do not pressure children to eat the food. If he/she doesn’t like it, it’s OK. Tell them to give it another try next time – that sometimes it takes our tastebuds time to adjust to a new taste or texture.
- If possible, sit at the table and try the foods with the students so that you can demonstrate trying new foods.
- Continue to encourage children to try and eat fruits and vegetables.

3) After students sample food, tell students that “It’s important for us to eat fresh foods when we have the opportunity. They are full of vitamins and minerals that keep our bodies healthy.”

4) Discuss the properties of foods. What minerals and vitamins are in foods and how do they help us. Tell students foods can boost your mood such as: salmon, yogurt, walnuts, popcorn, bananas, dark chocolate, oysters and spinach.

5) When allotted time has lapsed, ask for attention and for student feedback. Did you try any new foods? What foods did you like? Were there any foods that you didn’t like? What was it about the food that made you dislike it? Texture or taste? Write comments on poster board.

6) Save 5 minutes for closure: Announce that today is the last official day of the Comfortable Cafeteria program. Ask students what they learned and what they liked best? Encourage students to continue to help make the cafeteria a comfortable place to enjoy their meal and conversations with friends.

Tiers 2 and 3: A Lunch Bunch is a great way to offer small group interventions. For students who are selective eaters, take it slow and keep it positive. Limit the types of foods available. Have students sample one new food each week. Even if the child touches the food to her/his lips, praise is deserved. Some children need to touch the
food and become familiar with it visually and through touch before deciding to put it in their mouth. Avoid pressuring the child to eat certain foods.

Another way to help introduce new foods, is to have students prepare foods for lunch or a snack. Encourage the students to touch the foods with their hands and provide paper towels so the student can wipe their hands if they wish. Once they can touch the foods, have them play games/activities smelling foods. The students can then move on to “kissing” the foods. Once students are willing to place the foods in their mouths, they can have small “tasting buckets” to dispose of the foods if they wish. Take it slow and keep it positive! Refer to “Parent Tips: Picky Eaters” by B. Fenhaus, OTR. SPD Foundation, Star Lights Newsletter. Link: http://spdfoundation.net/newsletter/2011/10/starlights-parents.html

Explore funding options for purchase of fruits and vegetables. If the school has a parent organization (PTO or PTA), contact them ahead of time to see if they can supply the food or provide funding to purchase it.

Reputable websites with educational materials for children/youth. These websites provide developmentally appropriate learning tools for preschool, school-age and teens. Many free and downloadable resources are available.

3) Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. (www.eatright.org)
4) UT Health Science Center, School of Medicine, San Antonio. Teacher Lessons on Food Labels and Nutrition. http://teachhealthk12.uthscsa.edu/curriculum/nutrition/nutrition04-foodlabel.asp

Congratulations on completing Week #6 of the Comfortable Cafeteria Program! Now focus on sustainability! It is important to keep revisiting the cafeteria themes.

Suggestions:
• Occupational therapist: Attend lunch routinely to reinforce themes and identify students who may be experiencing challenges. Problem solve solutions with the cafeteria supervisors and recommend accommodations. Consider facilitating a Lunch Bunch in a section of the cafeteria with a small group of students with and without challenges.
• Cafeteria supervisors: Seek assistance and input from the occupational therapist if you are experiencing challenges in the cafeteria. The OT can provide ongoing consultation and coaching to assist you in helping maintain a comfortable cafeteria.
• Visit the Every Moment Counts Pinterest site for more fun-filled cafeteria ideas. Encourage supervisors to implement a fun activity once per week to remind students about: being a good friend, engaging in enjoyable mealtime conversations, including others, and trying new healthy foods.

Developed by Louise Demirjian, MA, OTR/L, Fran Horvath, OTR/L, Lauren Baird, MOT, OTR/L, & Susan Bazyk, PhD, OTR/L for Every Moment Counts (2014)

Disclaimer: There are no copyright restrictions for use of these documents. However, please cite and credit the source when copying all or part of these materials. This website and all of the Every Moment Counts documents were supported in whole or in part by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, (Award number H027A130158-13A, CFDA 84.027A, awarded to the Ohio Department of Education). The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and no official endorsement by the Department should be inferred.