

Preparing for the Mealtime

Engaging Your Young Child with Visual Impairment

Having a beginning, middle, and end to daily routines is often a helpful way to assist young children with visual impairment in becoming comfortable and successful in their typical schedules. Given a familiar routine, children are often better able to accept unexpected changes and to generalize their skills in new environments or situations. In the mealtime routine, **providing opportunities for children to participate in mealtime preparation serves as the 'beginning' in the sequence of preparation, eating, and clean-up.**

Some engaging ways for young children to learn about **Mealtime Preparation** include:

- **Narration:** Describe what you are doing as you prepare meals. Provide items for your child to safely touch and explore as you cook.
- **Part-Whole Presentations:** Help your child learn about part-whole relationships. Let him/her feel the whole item (examples: banana, apple, squash) and then let him/her feel the pieces as they are cut (sometimes horizontally, sometimes vertically, sometimes on an angle). Describe the end pieces as well. Part-whole relationships can also be introduced by describing the parts that will not be eaten. This might include stems, leaves, and seeds, among others.
- **Raw/Cooked:** After allowing your child the chance to explore the whole-part relationships above, provide the opportunity for him/her to feel and smell the raw and then cooked items. Most foods (examples: carrots, celery, potatoes, pears) are softer when cooked and may vary in texture depending on the recipe and way the item is being used. For example, a potato cooked for mashing may be softer than one used for a scalloped recipe. Talk about the differences as your child feels the foods.
- **Temperature Differences:** Talk about and explore the differences in temperature among items that are frozen, cold, room temperature, warm, and (safely) hot.
- **Texture Differences:** Foods offer an ideal opportunity to introduce various textures. It is essential to use a gentle, non-forced, hand-under-hand approach to assure touching the different textures is introduced as a positive experience. Small amounts at a time are suggested. Providing a divided plate or cookie sheet that allows the foods to be separate will be helpful for some children.
- **Environmental Sounds:** Environmental sounds are important in helping your child learn about his/her surrounding environments and to later recognize them. Talking about and describing what your child hears around him/her as you enter a room, prepare or clean up

after a meal, and more provides him/her with the opportunity to learn about the sounds, what they are associated with, and where the sounds are typically heard. Pairing the sources of sound with actual hands-on exploration of them (if it is safe to do so, such as feeling the cold water as it starts running after the faucet is turned on) strengthens your child's learning experience and sets the stage for future concept development. Teaching your child about what s/he hears around her will help her learn about and understand the environment she is in and to anticipate the types of activities that occur there.

Vignette

*Dave is ready to begin dinner preparation for his family. He will be serving a pesto pasta dish. Dave begins the meal by taking baby Josie out to the garden to pick some fresh basil. He gives Josie the opportunity to touch and smell the plant before they pick some stems and talks about the experience (The basil is **warm** because of the sun, it is as **tall as Josie**, it makes a '**snap**' sound when they take stems off the plant). He helps Josie hold the basil as they take it in the house. Dave gives Josie a bowl with some of the dry pasta as she sits on the floor. She starts out by banging on the metal bowl with her hands, but eventually begins to touch the dry pasta. Dave talks to her about the dry pasta, about the water he will use to cook it, and about the heat of the stove. He lets her know that the blender is going to be loud and gives her a '1-2-3' cue **before** he starts the blender to make the pesto sauce. Dave lets Josie touch some of the cooked pasta after it has cooled. He lets her touch the pasta and also the pasta with the pesto sauce mixed in. Josie needs her pasta to be slightly blended so Dave again prepares her for the sound of the blender and lets her touch her blended meal before he helps her eat it with a spoon. Josie needs a few minutes to listen to the family enjoying their dinner before she decides to touch the plate in front of her. She enjoys using her hands to eat some of the food and then allows her mom to help her eat some of the rest with a spoon. Josie has enjoyed the different tastes, smells, temperatures, and textures of a healthy meal.*