

# Self-Assessment for Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies

## Policy Component 2: Eating Environment

This tool is intended to help child care programs assess their current nutrition and physical activity practices and identify areas in need of improvement, based on the policy recommendations of the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) *Action Guide for Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies*. This document is one of six self-assessment tools available in the “[Documents/Forms](#)” section of the CSDE’s [Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies](#) webpage.



**Step 1 — Assessment.** Check the appropriate box to indicate whether each policy recommendation is fully implemented, partially implemented, or not implemented by the child care program. Refer to the child care program’s policies and guidelines. If a policy recommendation does not apply, check “NA” (not applicable). For example, the policy recommendations for infants do not apply to an afterschool program serving school-age children.

	Implementation			
	Full	Partial	None	NA
<b>Meal schedules for children</b>				
1. The child care program schedules meal and snack periods at appropriate times that are not too close together or too far apart. Food is offered at least every three hours so that children’s hunger does not overwhelm their ability to self-regulate food intake.				
2. To encourage meal consumption and improve children’s behavior, mealtimes are scheduled after structured physical activity or active play.				
3. Adequate time is provided to allow all children to eat and socialize. Scheduled mealtimes provide children with at least 20 minutes to eat breakfast or snack and at least 30 minutes to eat lunch or supper, after the children are sitting at the table.				
4. The child care program accommodates the tooth-brushing regimens of all children, including those with special oral health needs, e.g., orthodontia or high tooth decay risk.				
<b>Meal schedules for infants</b>				
5. The child care program feeds infants according to the written feeding plan provided by parents. Infants are fed on demand following cues for hunger and fullness.				
6. Infants’ teeth and gums are wiped with a disposable tissue or gauze after each feeding.				

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### Policy Component 2: Eating Environment

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	Full	Partial	None	NA
<b>Pleasant and healthy eating environment (physical, social, and emotional): Children</b>				
7. The child care program serves meals and snacks in safe, clean and pleasant settings, and develops an eating environment that provides children with a relaxed, enjoyable climate. The eating environment is a place where children have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adequate space to eat;</li> <li>• clean and pleasant surroundings;</li> <li>• appropriate and culturally relevant eating dishes and utensils;</li> <li>• pleasant conversation; and</li> <li>• convenient access to hand washing facilities before meals and snacks.</li> </ul>				
8. Mealtimes include predictable routines, such as washing hands before coming to the table, assisting with setting plates and utensils, and cleaning up after meals.				
9. Meals are served family style, where children serve themselves from common platters of food with assistance from supervising adults who sit and eat with the children. The child care program uses mealtime as an opportunity to teach nutrition and food concepts. Adults eating with the children encourage social interaction and conversation, and ask questions and talk about nutrition concepts related to the foods being served.				
10. To support the development of healthy eating habits, staff members observe children’s hunger and fullness cues and implement strategies that support children’s self-regulation of food intake.				
11. Staff members encourage children to try foods but never force, coax, or bribe children to eat.				
12. Staff members do not praise children for finishing food or cleaning their plates.				
13. Mealtime is never used to discipline or scold children.				
<b>Pleasant and healthy eating environment (physical, social, and emotional): Infants</b>				
14. The child care program follows best practices for feeding infants, as defined by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Infants are provided a safe, calm, and uninterrupted feeding environment.				
15. Staff members hold infants while they are being fed and never lay them down to sleep or propped in a bouncy chair or high chair with a bottle.				
16. Whenever possible, infants are fed by a single caregiver to develop familiarity, encourage bonding, and make mealtime an enjoyable experience.				

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	Full	Partial	None	NA
<b>Modeling healthy behaviors</b>				
17. The child care program recognizes the importance of staff members as positive role models for children as they learn to live healthy lives. Staff members model behaviors for healthy eating, physical activity (including limited screen time), and positive body image in the presence of children. They do not consume unhealthy foods and beverages such as candy and soda in front of children.				
18. The child care program encourages parents to reinforce these positive messages by serving as role models for their children at home.				
<b>Food rewards and punishments</b>				
19. Staff members do not use foods or beverages as rewards for performance or good behavior, unless this practice is required by a child's individualized education program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).				
20. Staff members never withhold food or beverages (including food served through CACFP meals) as a punishment.				
21. The child care program develops alternative nonfood reinforcement for appropriate behavior.				
<b>Food service personnel qualifications and training</b>				
22. Qualified nutrition professionals administer the CACFP. The child care program provides adequate training and continuing professional development for all nutrition and food service personnel.				
23. Food service personnel regularly participate in professional development activities that address all applicable areas of food service operations, including planning, preparing, and serving nutritious, safe, and appealing meals and snacks that meet the required CACFP meal pattern components and serving sizes.				
24. Food service personnel regularly participate in professional development activities that address other appropriate topics, such as nutrition, strategies for promoting healthy eating behaviors, and accommodating special dietary needs.				
<b>Food safety</b>				
25. All foods and beverages made available in the child care program comply with federal, state and local food safety and sanitation regulations. This includes foods and beverages served for CACFP meals and snacks, nutrition education activities (such as cooking and taste-testing), celebrations, and other events on site.				
26. The child care program takes appropriate precautions during food preparation to eliminate foods that are high risks for choking and use preparation methods to make all foods safe to eat.				
<b>Staff wellness</b>				
27. The child care program highly values the health and well-being of every staff member. The child care program promotes and provides activities and resources that support personal efforts by staff members to maintain a healthy lifestyle and that encourage staff members to serve as role models for children.			None	NA

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**Step 2 — Prioritize areas for change.** Review the areas rated “none” or “partial” and identify the priority areas for change in your child care program. For implementation strategies and resources, refer to the CSDE’s *Action Guide for Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies*.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 3 — Develop an action plan for each priority area.** For more information, refer to the CSDE’s action planning form and sample completed action planning form in the “[Documents/Forms](#)” section of the CSDE’s [Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies](#) webpage.

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## Policy Component 2: Eating Environment

### Resources

Action Guide for Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/CCPolicy/Child\\_Care\\_Action\\_Guide.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/CCPolicy/Child_Care_Action_Guide.pdf)

Bite Size: Meeting the CACFP Meal Patterns for Children (“Related Resources” section of CSDE’s Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs/Related-Resources>

CACFP Infant Meal Pattern (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/Infants/Infant\\_Meal\\_Pattern\\_CACFP.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/Infants/Infant_Meal_Pattern_CACFP.pdf)

CACFP Meal Patterns for Children (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs>

Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Child-Care-Nutrition-and-Physical-Activity-Policies>

Choking Prevention “Documents” section of CSDE’s Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Food-Safety-for-Child-Nutrition-Programs/Documents#ChokingPrevention>

Competencies, Knowledge and Skills for Child Care Providers in CACFP Operations (Institute of Child Nutrition):

<https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/competencies-knowledge-and-skills-for-child-care-providers-in-cacfp-operations/>

Eating Environment (“Related Resources” section of CSDE’s Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs/Related-Resources#EatingEnvironment>

Family Style Meal Service (“Related Resources” section of CSDE’s Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs/Related-Resources#FamilyStyle>

Feeding Infants in CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Feeding-Infants-in-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs>

Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Food-Safety-for-Child-Nutrition-Programs>

Guide to Meal Modifications in CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/SpecDiet/Guide\\_Meal\\_Modifications\\_CACFP.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/SpecDiet/Guide_Meal_Modifications_CACFP.pdf)

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies](#) webpage or contact the [CACFP staff](#) in the CSDE's Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/CCPolicy/Assess\\_Policies\\_Eating\\_Environment.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/CCPolicy/Assess_Policies_Eating_Environment.pdf).

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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