



Preschools SHINE Fact Sheet

Criteria for Element 4: Nutrition Education

- **Provide healthy nutrition experiences for children regularly (two to four times per month).**
- **Display, in the site environment, images of healthy foods on posters, in storybooks, and on other materials.**

Eating habits do not occur by accident; they are learned. During their early years, children form eating habits that will last a lifetime. Therefore, nutrition education must be an important part of child care curricular activities. Nutrition education provides children with meaningful opportunities to experience healthy foods and develop knowledge and skills needed to make appropriate food choices. Teachers and family child care providers can support positive eating habits by creating healthy nutrition environments and providing positive food experiences to help young children enjoy healthy, nutritious foods. Follow the best practices below to meet the criteria for Element 4.

Ensure Policies are in Place

Does the site have nutrition education policies? Keep in mind that policies help convey to teachers, family child care providers, and parents the practices at the center or family child care home.

To promote nutrition education:

- Develop written nutrition education policies for the site. To get started on developing your own or to view sample policies, refer to the fact sheet on Element 8: Wellness Policies.
- Share the nutrition education policies with all staff members and families.

Choose a Nutrition Education Curriculum

- Choose a curriculum, such as Food for Thought (http://www.healthypreschoolers.com/?page_id=12), or resources consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans that incorporate mathematics, science, and language arts. Use of a curriculum aligned with the guidelines can help children develop an awareness of good nutrition and healthy eating habits. For other nutrition education curricula, visit Healthy & Active Preschoolers (http://www.healthypreschoolers.com/?page_id=49) or the Preschool SHINE Web Resources.
- Make sure all teachers and providers are trained in use of the curriculum.
- Do not use curricula, books, or resources that contain logos or brand names of foods and beverages with little nutritional value.

Create a Healthy Food Environment

- Post pictures of healthy foods on the walls.
- Provide storybooks that depict healthy nutrition messages.
- Include models of nutritious food and/or kitchen equipment in the site's dramatic play area.
- Reinforce nutrition education at mealtimes. Model healthy eating, eat the same mealtime foods as the children, and talk about the meal or snack.
- For fund-raising activities, sell only nonfood items or healthy foods.

Create a Culturally Inclusive Food Environment

- Include in the curriculum foods that reflect cultural diversity.
- Add props of healthy foods and utensils/equipment from a variety of cultures in the dramatic play area.
- Provide storybooks that include foods from various cultures.
- Ask families to share healthy cultural recipes that children can prepare as a cooking activity.

Increase Exposure to a Variety of Healthy Foods

Hands-on experiences are vital in developing a child's love for food and nutrition.

- Get cooking! Cooking activities are excellent ways for children to develop an appreciation for a variety of foods. They allow children to explore foods through the use of their senses.
- Take field trips to farmers markets, farms, orchards, or bakeries and other food venues. To locate a farmers market in your area, visit the Healthy & Active Preschoolers Web site (http://www.healthypreschoolers.com/?page_id=49).
- Read stories about food and sing songs and chants about healthy nutrition to help develop awareness about healthy eating. For songs and storybooks, visit the Healthy & Active Preschoolers Web site (http://www.healthypreschoolers.com/?page_id=27).
- Conduct food tastings that expose children to a variety of new foods.

Involve Families

- Share nutrition education policies with families.
- Provide information on nutrition to families via a newsletter, Web site, or fact sheets.
- Invite a guest speaker to talk about nutrition on family nights.
- Invite families on field trips.
- Invite families to participate in planned cooking activities with children.

