Follow a Meal and Snack Schedule

Regularly scheduled meal and snack times help toddlers and preschoolers learn structure for eating.

Children are more likely to eat healthy meals and try new foods if snacks are not offered too close to mealtime.

Tips for setting a mealtime schedule:

- **Plan for 3 meals and 1 or 2 snacks each day.** Toddlers and preschoolers often do not eat enough at a meal to stay full until the next mealtime.

- **Snacks should contribute to each child’s daily nutrient needs.** Make sure that the foods offered at each meal and snacks are part of a healthy diet. Avoid letting children have “extras” such as candy or cookies to make up for a meal not eaten.

- **Set reasonable limits for the start and end of a meal.** When you can see that the child is no longer interested in the meal, excuse him or her from the table.

- **Listen to children.** Although schedules are helpful, it is also important to listen to children. For example, if a child says he or she is hungry, offer a small, healthy snack. It’s important to allow children to recognize when they are hungry or full. (see the handout, Help Kids Listen to their Bodies)

Adapted from http://www.choosemyplate.gov/