

SNAP-Ed Toolkit

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Mindful Eating in Preschool Setting

Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Early Head Start

Overview

Mindful Eating in Preschool Setting (MEPS) is an intervention designed to prevent and reverse childhood obesity, help children develop healthy relationships with food, prevent the development of eating disorders, and instill early taste preferences for diverse healthy foods. MEPS includes training child care centers' teaching staff on the basics of mindfulness and mindful eating and its implementation in classrooms. Its main premises are removing all distractions (technology, TV, toys) while eating; bringing children's attention to foods on the table, and talking about foods' colors, tastes, textures, and origins; engaging children in table setting and cleaning, serving themselves, and helping their peers (elements of family-style dining); encouraging (never forcing) children to try different foods; ensuring mealtimes are always at a table, using plates - never on-the-go; teaching children to eat when hungry, and not to turn to food in distress or when bored. Staff training consists of 3 1-hour training sessions with a follow-up upon need with workshops and technique demonstrations for further implementation in classroom settings. **Target Behavior:** Healthy Eating, Physical Activity and Reducing Screen Time, Food Insecurity/Food Assistance **Intervention Type:** Direct Education

Intervention Reach and Adoption

MEPS targets infants, toddlers, and preschoolers (0-5 years old) from low-income families and teaching staff at early childcare centers. The target audience presents high rates of overweight and obesity along with indicators of high consumption of processed foods, sugar-sweetened beverages, and irregular meal routines. **Setting:** Child care (Learn) **Target Audience:** Preschool (<5 years), Adults **Race/Ethnicity:** All

Intervention Components

MEPS includes the following components:

- Carrying out of mealtimes void of distractions
- Eating seated around the table using plates and utensils, communal bowls, and serving utensils (child-sized)
- Having pleasant conversations about foods being served: their color, texture, taste origin
- Creating learning environments by asking children about their feelings, sensations, likes, and dislikes
- Adapting children to calm and peaceful mealtimes and teaching them to respond to their physical hunger by eating; address non-hunger eating by substituting it with other activities (quiet time, reading, physical and other activities, conversations about feelings)

All components are necessary to promote reduction of non-hunger eating, leading to decreased intake and better weight outcomes (decreased obesity). Teacher training sessions are designed as follows:

- Session 1: overview of mindfulness and mindful eating, research and current data on their benefits, different methods to practice mindfulness;
- Session 2: practicing mindfulness through a guided breathing exercise (5-7 minutes); practicing mindful eating through a guided raisin eating exercise; overview of mindful eating implementation in early childcare and education centers;
- Session 3: group activity – teachers are teamed in groups to work on developing a sample mindful eating lesson plan; they pick a food or several foods as examples and then share with other groups.

Intervention Materials

To implement MEPS, settings or organizations need the following materials:

- Raisin-mindful-eating activity
 - Needed material: raisins, calm relaxing music for guided activity
- Children-engaging materials
 - Needed materials: pictures of different fruits and veggies, textured fabrics attached to develop sensory associations
- Communal bowls and appropriately-sized utensils to implement family style dining

Intervention Costs

There are costs associated with purchasing of communal bowls and child-size serving utensils, along with books/printables of fruits and veggies with textured fabrics for sensory associations.

Evidence Summary

The teaching staff was surprised to learn from an ongoing discussion about their own eating patterns that do not correspond with physical hunger. They reported they would eat just because the food is in front of them or when being prompted by societal cues like going to the movies, watching TV, and eating with others. Their realization of their non-hunger eating lead them to understand the principles of unwanted weight gain and developing comorbidities. The results of the survey post mindful eating exercise demonstrate strong evidence of acute behavior change towards more mindful eating (86% of participants reported mindful eating in 83% of eating

activities during the experiment). Participants also verbally reported that they had improved satiety and taste sensitivity, ate less, and had less desire to eat all M&Ms in the bowl in front of them; they were able to notice the colors and texture along with the strength of taste. **Evidence-based Approach:** Emerging

Evaluation Indicators

Based on the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework, the following outcome indicators can be used to evaluate intervention progress and success.

	Readiness and Capacity – Short Term (ST)	Changes – Medium Term (MT)	Effectiveness and Maintenance – Long Term (LT)	Population Results (R)
Individual		MT1		
Environmental Settings		MT5		
Sectors of Influence				

MEPS did not measure outcomes using the SNAP-Ed Framework; however, these indicators could be appropriate:

- MT1: Healthy Eating
 - For example: MT1k eating fewer sweets
- MT5: Nutrition Supports
 - For example: MT5a policy changes to how food is served during mealtimes (i.e. family style dining).

Evaluation Materials

The following 10-question survey can be used. Answer choices are given as dropdown of the following options: *Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Not Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.*

1. I ate so quickly I hardly tasted what I ate
2. I did not question myself whether I was hungry before I ate
3. I ate until the food was gone
4. When I reached into the bowl, I was surprised there was no more food left
5. I would eat highly palatable foods (like sweets) even in the absence of physical hunger
6. I reach for food when I'm stressed, anxious, nervous, bored or sad
7. I was thinking about different things I had to do, while I was eating
8. Before I ate I did not take a moment to think about the food in front of me, notice its color, texture, and appreciate its taste
9. My thoughts were wandering while I was eating
10. If there is a discount for a larger portion of a meal ("2-for-1"), I would buy it even if I am not that hungry"

Additional Information

Website: The [MEPS website](#) includes the intervention's overview, components, list of materials, and implementation strategies. **Contact Person:** Tatiana Larionova 305-389-6786 tlarionova@elcndm.org