Children learn a variety of skills for serving themselves. Here are some of those skills that you can help children acquire.

**Hold and physically pass the bowls or pitchers.**  
Bowls with rims and pitchers with covers make beginning attempts at this task more forgiving.

**Pass the bowls or pitchers so they are successfully received by someone else.**  
Children need reminders to look at the person who is passing or receiving the bowl or pitcher. Toddlers can start “passing” with the teacher who is already skilled in looking. Toddlers and even young threes need to be reminded to look. They are busy learning the task of holding and at the same time moving the bowl of food or pitcher of milk. They may be unable to simultaneously focus on the third task of watching the other person in the duet of passing.

**Judge space for the bowls or pitchers.**  
Judging size of a bowl or pitcher and how much space it will take is a task best learned through trial and error. Children learn how far from the edge to place a bowl, so it does not become imbalanced and fall.

**Efficiently use serving utensils.**  
Provide utensils that are balanced, fairly lightweight, and have short handles that are small enough for young children’s hands to grasp all the way around. Try lightweight ice cream scoops, small tongs, small ladles, and spoons that have deep bowls.

**Direct requests and needs to people using give and take of conversation.**  
Teachers help by eating with children, modeling conversational give and take, and suggesting words to use when asking for foods.

**Wait their turns.**  
Be sure there are several pitchers or bowls on the table so waiting is not too long. Match the skills the children have for waiting, the number of children at the table, and the number of serving bowls.
Balance serving containers while they serve from them.
This means not dumping the food out of the container as they serve themselves. Consider putting small amounts of food in pitchers and bowls and increasing the amounts as the child gets more skilled. Neither children nor adults enjoy the interruption of spills!

Spoon food from a serving dish without using their fingers to steady food in the bowls.
Provide appropriate child friendly utensils and bowls with rounded sides that offer space to push food with the utensil against the rounded sides of the bowl.

Judge amounts of how much to put on their plates.
The initial novelty of serving self sometimes is reflected in children over serving their plates. This is usually short lived and resolves itself when children routinely serve themselves. To help children learn to judge amounts for pouring and scooping, try offering pouring and scooping activities at the sand or water table. Set out some pitchers and cups and glasses with water for a small group time. These non-food pouring/scooping activities give children practice.

Judge amounts of how much is in the bowl for children at the table.
Make sure there is plenty of food for children to get full. Sometimes you may run out of a desired food. With children older than three, it is appropriate to talk about how much is left. Discuss how we can each have a small bit of the remaining food, if we are still hungry. Give the option of eating some or not. Tell the children that you will be sure the food is served again. For younger children, remove the bowl from sight and redirect the child to more plentiful food.

Know the difference in serving utensils and personal eating utensils.
This skill is combined with the skill of delaying eating until they have switched hands from the serving utensils to their own spoon or fork. Make a definite and obvious difference in the size of the utensils they eat with and the size of the serving utensils. Choose forks, knives, and spoons that are child sized. Provide forks that have dull tines, spoons with rounded, blunt ends, and knives with rounded ends.

Keep themselves and others safe from cross contamination.
Hand washing is an obvious skill here. This includes techniques for proper hand washing as well as knowing WHEN to wash. This task includes using napkins instead of licking their hands, using only their own plates and flatware, and keeping their food on their plates.