Talking Points for Helping Teachers and Child Care Staff Develop a Mealtime Vision
Janice Fletcher, EdD and Laurel Branen, PhD, RD

When we set out to change something, we usually have vision of what we hope will occur. Imagine you want to redecorate a room. You would think about all aspects of that room, from flooring options to lighting options. You might think about how the sun flows into the room as you choose window coverings. You would consider who might visit as you plan the seating arrangements. As you choose the furniture coverings, you would choose things that are aesthetically pleasing, and perhaps easy to clean. You might consider the emotional aspects of the room, thinking about making sure the room has a cheery feeling. You would choose a good sound system and consider how conversation might take place.

Think about using a similar approach to helping teachers and staff consider their visions for mealtime environments for children.

Include the following aspects of the mealtime environment:

- Mealtime physical environment-- room arrangement, utensils, how food is presented, and how food safety is maintained
- Mealtime auditory environment-- ALL sounds that children hear, including staff and parent-staff interactions
- Mealtime social environment--people interactions at the mealtime, child-to-child discussions, teacher-child discussions, taking turns, and passing and serving food together.
- Mealtime language environment--talking, conversations, listening to others’ ideas or directions, and building vocabulary
- Mealtime emotional environment--how children and adults FEEL about what is happening including strategies concerning how much or whether children eat, whether they accept or reject food, and strategies for helping children keep in touch with their internal cues of hunger and fullness