

PRESCHOOL FOOD INITIATIVE RATING MATRIX ORIGINAL DESCRIPTION

A detailed description of the original table of standards and practices promoted and taught by the Preschool Food & Healthy Habits Initiative



Preschool Food & Healthy Habits Rating Matrix Description

Purpose

The Rating Matrix provides both a guide and a target for child care centers who want to improve the food and physical activity practices of their program. Preschool Food Initiative =PFI where designated.

Structure

The draft the Rating Matrix is organized according to nine subject areas:

1. **Food Quality Standards** (minimally-processed, healthful)
2. **Mealtime Practices** (using meal time as teaching time)
3. **Food Purchasing and Acquisition** (policies exist to ensure quality food)
4. **Staff Training** (PFI, Gardens, Curriculum Webbing, Communication)
5. **Educating Children** (teaching where food comes from)
6. **Physical Activity** – (program policies, yard design, teacher practices and children’s activities that support movement throughout the day)
7. **Food Literacy** – (information provided to parents in English and Spanish)
8. **Gardens** – (center of children’s education and source of food)
9. **Parents and Families** – (participation activities for parents and families)
10. **Nursing Mothers-Breastfeeding** – encouraged (location & expressing milk)

Rating Process

A combination six- and four-point rating scale allows center staff or an outside evaluator to determine the level a center has achieved on 50 separate items within the ten subject areas. All centers can qualify for one of four levels of development: Participating, Developing, Intermediate, and Advanced.

How the Matrix Can Be Used

The Matrix is used in several ways. Initially, it is used by center staff to identify their center’s level of development. This allows them to identify areas they wish to develop further and organize an approach to working with them. The matrix is also used by staff of the PFI Project to conduct a similar evaluation and better support that center’s efforts in development. Finally, the Matrix is used by PFI Initiative staff to determine the level of achievement by a center and acknowledge that level of achievement through a tiered recognition process similar to that of the Outdoor Classroom Demonstration Site process.

Description of Matrix Items

The Nutrition Guide

The “PFI Criteria” for healthy food is as follows:

- Whole
- Unprocessed
- Unpackaged
- No additives (artificial anything)
- No added sugars
- Locally grown
- “Organic”

Group I General Rating Categories

No Guide – The center provides no guidance of any kind regarding this item.

Verbal Guide – The center provides some level of verbal guidance regarding this item; however, the guidance does not adequately meet PFI criteria.

Verbal Guide Criteria – The center provides specific verbal guidance regarding this item that is perceived to meet PFI criteria, however the guidance is not written down.

Written Guide – The center provides some level of written guidance regarding this item; however, the guidance does not adequately meet PFI criteria.

Written Guide Criteria – The center provides specific written guidance regarding this item that is perceived to meet PFI criteria.

Written Guide & Parent Education – In addition to specific written guidance regarding this item that is perceived to meet PFI criteria, the information is made available to parents either through a written communication like a parent handbook or through a handout at a pre-enrollment, parent orientation or parent meeting that is held annually.

1. Food Quality Standards

Lunches/Meals primarily prepared on site OR Lunches/Meals primarily prepared off site (vendor) OR Lunches primarily brought prepared from home – Please reference the PFI nutrition guide to identify if PFI criteria are met.

Snack (regardless of source) – Please reference the PFI nutrition guide to identify if PFI criteria are met.

Special snacks/Celebrations – Please reference the PFI nutrition guide to identify if PFI criteria are met.

Teacher personal behavior / food guidelines – The PFI nutrition guide applies to food consumed on center premises by all, especially by teachers (in front of children or not) and is used as guidance for staff in what they bring to work. (Teachers and adults who supervise children are seen as role models for young children. It is very important that teachers display healthy food habits while at work. As a place to start, staff should never bring non-conforming food, such as fast food or sodas or eat such in front of children. To fully meet PFI guidelines, however, food consumed by staff on the premises needs to conform to that consumed by children to support healthy food practices.)

2. Meal Time Practices

Children eat family-style with teachers – Where food is centrally prepared, it is served family style in large containers as it would be at home. Where the children bring their lunches, any shared items, such as milk or water, are provided in a similar fashion. Teachers sit with the children at the children’s table while the children are eating.

Respectful/meaningful conversations with and among children at meals – While sitting at the lunch table, staff monitor, participate in and contribute to meaningful conversations with children.

Children's self-help skills at meals encouraged – Staff encourage and allow children to help set up for mealtime, to serve themselves (as age appropriate) and clean-up. Mealtime is regarded as a learning time for children, to participate in the process. Food from centralized kitchens is served in large containers and with utensils that children are able to use to serve themselves.

Real utensils, dishes and napkins are used by children – Utensils, cups, dishes and napkins used by children for snack and meals are washable and re-usable whether provided by the center or coming from home.

Recyclable utensils & dishes used by children – Where non-reusable utensils, cups and dishes are used, they are recycled. Children actively participate in this program (seen as part of clean-up process).

Compostable utensils & dishes used by children – Non-reusable utensils, cups and dishes are compostable and are composted. Children actively participate in this program (seen as part of clean-up process).

Center-wide compost/vermicompost (worm composting) program is in place – The center has a compost site or device and regularly composts its garbage. Children actively participate in this program by disposing their appropriate “leftover” food (i.e.veggie and fruit peels) in the compost or vermicompost system.

Center-wide recycle program is in place – Recycle containers are placed in every room of the center or outside area where children eat meals. The center has a plan and practice in place whereby glass, metal, paper and plastic are recycled. Children actively participate in this program, as appropriate.

3. Food Purchasing and Acquisition

Purchasing sources – As much food as possible is purchased from local sources and seasonal. To the degree possible, rather than purchasing food from sources that bring food in from far distances (i.e. in winter, Chilean grapes vs. locally grown citrus), strive to purchase food as close to home as possible, in Santa Barbara County, for example.

Purchasing type / ingredients – Food purchased is consistent with the PFI Nutrition Guide which emphasizes food that is organic (meets organic standards including being free of pesticides, food additives and coloring) is minimally processed, minimally packaged, and with no added sugars, if at all.

Food from home – Food from home meets the same standards as food that is purchased by the centers. Specifically, packaged food and food with added sweeteners is avoided.

Group II General Rating Categories

No Action – No action is being taken regarding the item

Talk About – Staff discuss ways of taking action regarding the item

Some Action – Staff are taking action regarding the item but the action is not fully implemented on a regular basis

Much Action – Staff are fully implementing the item on a regular basis

4. Staff Training

Staff is trained in PFI – A minimum of two center staff have taken the PFI Specialist series. The entire staff has had at least one full staff meeting of one hour at which the fundamentals of PFI have been presented.

Staff is trained in gardening & gardening- related curriculum – A minimum of two center staff have taken a gardening workshop.

Staff is trained in curriculum webbing – At least one teacher in each classroom is proficient in webbing. Curriculum webbing is defined as connecting the learning content being presented in and through all learning domains (Cognitive, Social-Emotional, Physical, Language & Literacy, etc.)

Staff is trained in communication/relationship building skills – A minimum of two staff have completed the PFI Specialist series or completed the OCP Specialist II series. The entire staff has had at least one full staff meeting of one hour at which key elements of communication and relationship-building as articulated in the Specialist II series have been presented. Staff are sensitive to the cultures of center families how this relates to food, activity levels, gardening, etc.

5. Educating Children

Children learn where food comes from, etc. – Where food comes from is a fundamental subject of ongoing curriculum in children’s programs. Throughout the year, on at least a weekly basis, the subject is discussed or activities are implemented that concern this subject matter.

Children experience what healthy food tastes like – Healthy food is consistently served in a manner that children regularly get to experience it.

Curriculum links to other content (webbing) – Webbing (linking one subject element to another) is a consistent feature of the program. Healthy food practices are connected with a wide variety of other subject matter such as science and social studies subjects (i.e., what food needs to grow; how food gets to markets). (Also, see above in *Staff are trained in curriculum webbing.*)

Field trips to local community resources or guest speakers / materials brought in – Utilizing outside resources is a regular part of the center’s curriculum program. Over the course of a year, the center takes field trips or brings in guest teachers or outside materials a minimum of six times per year. (i.e., Walks to local destinations such as stores, parks, or gardens or car/bus trips to further destinations such as nurseries, pumpkin patches, farms, etc. For programs on elementary school campuses that have developed gardens, older children can mentor the younger ones or guide the younger group on a “local” field trip to the garden.)

Group III General Rating Categories

Never – This item is never acted on

Seldom – This item is seldom acted on

A # of times – This item has been acted on a number of times

Regularly – This item is acted on a regular basis

or you may use:

No Action – No action is being taken regarding the item

Talk About – Staff discuss ways of taking action regarding the item

Some Action – Staff are taking action regarding the item but the action is not fully implemented on a regular basis

Much Action – Staff are fully implementing the item on a regularly occurring and ongoing basis. (This would usually mean either daily or weekly.)

6. Physical Activity

Policy/practices about outdoor programming – The center has an outdoor program in place that supports children’s physical activity. This program is articulated to staff and parents and is reflected in center practice.

Play yard design-storage, indoor/outdoor flow – The design of the facility supports physical activity. There is open/safe space for running. There is outdoor storage of items that support physical activity. Gross motor play area can be directly accessed from the classroom.

Children are physically active – Children can be seen running, using their upper bodies, and generally engaging in vigorous physical activity on a daily basis.

Teachers are physically active w/children – Teachers are consistently physically active and engaged with the children in their play and/or activities. Teachers set-up and participate with children in age-appropriate physical activities that give children opportunities to increase skill levels. Again, teachers are seen as role models for children.

Substantial outdoor time is available to children – Children are outdoors a minimum of two hours per day for full day programs and one hour per day for half day programs. Additional ways to accomplish this is to see that all learning can occur outdoors. (Can include eating outdoors, gardening activities, etc.)

Varied activities are offered outdoors – On any given day, a minimum of three gross motor and three other types of activities are available outdoors. (To qualify, “gross motor activities” should not be teacher-directed or led.)

Outdoor play allowed in variety of weather – Children are encouraged and supported to be outside during inclement weather that is otherwise safe. (Examples of unsafe outdoor conditions could be poor air quality conditions that are smoky or so windy as to bring down tree branches.)

7. Food Literacy

Parent and family information is provided through postings, newsletters, etc. – The center has a mechanism for distributing written information such as a bulletin board or newsletter and provides information on healthy food and activity practices throughout the year via it.

Information given in Spanish as available – Information is provided in Spanish for those parents and families who need it.

Center resource/library available to parents – There is a place at the center that contains informational materials on healthy food and activity practices as well as materials such as children’s books available for parents to use with their children (Spanish language, books to borrow and take home, etc.).

Related research shared w/parents & families – Research relevant to healthy food and activity practices is shared with parents and families.

Share recipes children likely to eat – The center provides parents with healthy food recipes that are used at the center and that children are likely to eat.

Share resources for healthy food purchasing – The center provides to parents resources where healthy foods can be purchased. This includes ways to eat healthier for lower cost.

Link w/local, community resources – The center has a list of local community resources such as food sources and recreational facilities and programs that might contribute to family and center efforts in manifesting healthy food and activities. This information is shared with parents.

8. Gardens

Year round productive garden is in place – The center has an active, year-round garden that can be accessed by a minimum of 20% of the children who might use play yard at any given time. The garden may be in one location or in several. It can be in any form such as raised beds, boxes, or at ground level.

Garden provides food for consumption – Throughout the year, the garden grows items that are eaten by the children.

Garden is an active learning environment – The garden is used weekly by the children and teachers as a learning environment. This learning may be related directly (i.e., gardening) or indirectly (i.e., art) to the garden.

Garden-related curriculum provided year long – Curriculum activities related to the garden (i.e., science, math, literacy) occur on a weekly basis throughout the year.

Garden plants honor cultural diversity – Plants grown in the garden reflect the cultural context of the children (i.e., items that might be used in everyday cooking in the children’s homes).

Gardens are pesticide & chemical free – No pesticides or other dangerous chemicals are used in the garden. Gardens are “organic”.

9. Parents and Families

Attend meetings, conferences, and center events – Center hold events during the year for parents at which healthy food and activity practices are discussed.

Children/families home eating habits improve – As a result of healthy food and activity practices at the center, children and their families establish more healthy eating habits at home. [Note: Testing this will require a brief survey]

Children/families spend more time outside – As a result of healthy food and activity practices at the center, children and their families spend more time physically active outdoors [Note: Testing this will require a brief survey]

Hold healthy food potlucks and celebrations – Events at the center where families attend, and at which food is served, follow healthy food guidelines.

PFI Parent Committee represented at Center – The center establishes and maintains a parent group that helps to support the practice of healthy nutrition and activity at the center. (Note: This activity may be a part of an existing parent committee that has a broader scope of responsibility such as room parents or a parent advisory committee.)

Parents, families participate/help in garden – Over the course of the year, parents are involved with the garden (i.e., with cultivation, maintenance, or activities with the children).

Parents have access to produce from garden – A mechanism for connecting produce from the garden to the children's homes is in place. This may be food, flowers, plants or products (i.e., pumpkins at Halloween, herbs for cooking meals) that are grown in the garden and are either taken home by the children or picked up by the parents.

10. Nursing Mothers (for centers with infant program components)

Allow and encourage breastfeeding – The center actively promotes breast feeding in its literature and through verbal communication to parents.

Provide private space for breast feeding – As requested, space is provided for mother to nurse their babies. (This does not have to be the same space every time.)

Handle expressed milk – The center has the capacity to store expressed milk in frozen or unfrozen form, warm it and provide it to infants.

Provide private space w/ electricity for expressing milk – The center provides a private space where mothers can express milk. (This does not have to be the same space every time.)