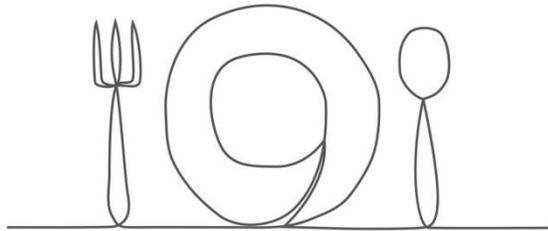


UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS:
What Alaskan Foster Parents Need to Know
TOPIC: #4 Nutrition and Eating

7 AAC 67.370 Nutrition and Eating in the Foster Home

This series is a guide to the regulations but is not a substitute. In all discrepancies between the information in this series and the regulations, the regulations are the final authority. Contact your licensing worker for a complete copy of the regulations.

WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY...
About Nutrition in General?



Good nutrition and eating are basic to a child's health. The foster care regulations guide resource parents as to any restrictions or special considerations around food and the foster child.

As a foster parent, you should strive to make the food you serve children and youth nutritious, well balanced and sufficient enough to help children stay healthy. That includes snacks as well. We have included the [current dietary guidelines](#) recommended by the US Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Health and Human Services to offer a way to look at balancing good food and nutritional needs. Sometimes fresh foods can be harder to find or more expensive in rural areas. Use good judgment in applying nutritional guidelines to the resources of the community you live in. Look toward locally grown, traditional foods and subsistence foods to get equivalents of good nutrition.

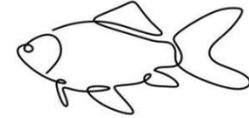
A resource parent should also find out about any existing food allergies or special dietary needs of each child (such as for a child with diabetes) and shall plan that child's meals accordingly. Additionally, resource parents need to have approval from a case worker and written instructions from a physician, parent or guardian before providing a child with nutrient concentrates, nutrient supplements, or any type of modified diet, including a therapeutic and/or allergy diet. Talk to your health provider and get all instructions in writing and then share your plan with your caseworker for approval.

EXAMPLE: *If your foster child is allergic to wheat products, you will need to obtain permission from the case worker, and plan meals for him based on instructions from a physician or parent, with non-wheat based products.*

Snacks are also included in the guidelines. Have a place for healthy snacks that children can have when they get hungry such as a fruit bowl or a shelf in the refrigerator with yogurt or an accessible shelf with raisins or crackers.

WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY ...
About Cultural and Ethnic Food?

If a child is in your home full time, you are encouraged to provide foods reflecting the ethnic and cultural background of children in care, including foods provided by a child's own family. This shows respect for the child and his family's culture. For home canned food, follow basic safety guidelines. The top should be indented and



make a "whoosh" sound when you open it to make sure the jar was sealed in canning. The Cooperative Extension Office nearest you has information on canning, food preparation and storing. For foods that come with the child, remember that Native foods may have a strong odor--so that doesn't mean the food is spoiled! Dried foods are generally safe. Look for Native Alaska Food cookbooks at bookstores.

EXAMPLE: A Native Alaskan child is in your home and a family member gives you salmon or dried fish or seal. You should make every attempt to serve the food to your foster child. If you do not know how to prepare a dish, ask the family member or another resource parent for ideas.

EXAMPLE: If a Filipino child is in your home, you should try to find dishes familiar to him to serve at some of your mealtimes.



WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY...
Feeding Infants

Regulations also provide guidance on nutrition for feeding infants. Foster parent should follow the pediatrician's recommendations for nutrition and feeding of infants.

And babies mean bottles! If you have an infant in your home, remember good sanitary bottle practices! If you are reusing bottles, bottle caps and nipples, between every use, washing them in a dishwasher with hot water and a heated drying cycle or boil them in water for at least five minutes. Refrigerate your used bottle, or discard the contents if not used with 20 hours.

Resource parents need to seek permission from the caseworker if they would like to feed the baby breast milk provided by anyone other than the baby's biological mother. OCS also has specific regulations around babies not being left to hold bottles on their own or bottle propping.

WHAT DO THE REGULATIONS SAY...

About Food and Discipline?

Except for medical reasons, a foster home may not deny food to a child, force-feed a child, or otherwise coerce a child to eat against the child's will for any reason. Encouraging a child to eat is okay. Mealtimes should not turn into a fight over food and eating. Food should not be used to control or punish foster children. The sharing of food should be a pleasant time for you and the child.

EXAMPLE OF WHAT IS NOT ALLOWED UNDER THE REGULATIONS:

- ⇒ *You cannot force-feed a child by spooning the food in yourself if he does not want to eat.*
- ⇒ *You cannot punish a child by taking away her supper and sending her to bed hungry. (If a child refuses to eat the meal you have prepared and goes to bed hungry by her choice that is not denying a meal to a child.)*
- ⇒ *You cannot punish a child for not eating by serving him his uneaten meal from the day before.*
- ⇒ *You can encourage a child to eat, plead with him, and refuse dessert if the main meal is not eaten as long as you are not threatening a child or forcing him to eat against his will.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

At the end of this training resource are the [current dietary guidelines](#) recommended by the US Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Health and Human Services. Another article in this packet looks at children's eating habits that may be related to insecurity or early trauma – *Resource Paper: Food Challenges and the Child Or Youth in Foster Care.*

For more information about the **UNDERSTANDING THE REGULATIONS: What Alaskan Foster Parents Need to Know** series, contact the Alaska Center for Resource Families at 1-800-478-7307 or acrf@nwresource.org

**RESOURCE PAPER:
Food Challenges And The Child Or Youth In Foster Care**

Sometimes, a child in foster care may have problems around eating. These problems may stem from how food was handled in other homes he lived in or from the secondary results of trauma. Always follow the guidelines for nutrition and food outlined in the regulations. In addition, here are some suggestions for dealing with three common food problems in foster children.

REFUSING TO EAT HEALTHY FOODS

Remember, many children in foster care may not be used to healthy, nutritious meals. They may only want to eat junk food or sweets and drink soda instead of milk. Some children (such as those affected by prenatal alcohol exposure) may physically crave sugar and do not seem to ever get enough. In some cases, a child may not eat your food because it is strange to them or they may be used to foods you do not serve in your home. Restrict access to unhealthy and “junk” foods in your house. An occasional sweet or trip for hamburgers is okay. Always remember -- *be patient*. You can help a child learn to eat better and more healthily. But it may take a child a long time to change the ingrained habits brought to your home.

Determining the reason why children do not eat healthy foods will help you deal with this more effectively. Serve a variety of foods that may appeal to the child and offer foods that the child is familiar with or are their favorites. If a child has some physical disabilities, they may be very sensitive to certain foods, tastes and textures, so their reluctance to eat may be related to what you are serving. Consult a health provider for assistance.

EATING TOO MUCH

Sometimes children may eat too much, seeming to gorge themselves at every meal. This may be because they are not used to regular meals or did not know where the next meal was coming from. They may eat foods from the cupboard or refrigerator without permission. Help this kind of child put limits on their food intake. Offer enough food so that children will not go hungry. If a child does not know when to stop eating, or gets into a pattern of gorging themselves at every meal, you may need to put a limit (2-3 helpings) on food. Have snacks available to the child and put these in a clearly defined spot. Children need the security of knowing that they will be fed regularly each day. Have regular meal and snack times and constantly reassure children that there will be another meal.

HOARDING OR HIDING FOOD

Hiding food is not uncommon in children who have been neglected, abandoned or not fed regularly. Some children may hide food in their rooms. You may find food hidden in drawers, under beds or even in clothes. Many of these problems are related to a child’s insecurities or neglect. Follow the suggestions given in the section on ***EATING TOO MUCH***. Have snacks available to the child. Constantly reassure children you will take care of them. Provide regular mealtimes so that a child learns to trust that they will be cared for.

Hoarding food has to do with inner insecurity. It does not mean a child is not getting enough to eat in the foster home. It may lessen only when children feel stable and cared for. Do not punish a child for hiding food. Provide reassurance. If food hoarding is a severe problem, you may need to let children keep food in their room, but only if it cannot spoil. (**Examples:** *nuts, raisins, dried fruit, dry cereal, crackers*). Another idea is to designate a special snack shelf in the kitchen that has these same items and keep it filled.

Eating habits take a long time to change. Try to make the sharing of food a pleasant and nurturing time. A child’s eating is not a reflection of how good a parent you are. Think of eating as a habit. You are trying to get all your children to get into the habit of eating well. Some children may have a more difficult time learning and need your patience and guidance.

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