

# It's Good for Them! Promoting Physical and Social-Emotional Development at Snacks and Mealtimes

## Introduction

**Content level:** Basic

The materials below were developed for the audio conference that originally aired on August 1, 2007. Use this information to supplement your learning and to evaluate the experience.

To make the most of this training experience:

1. **Participate as a team!** Include administrators, nutrition coordinators and direct service staff at all levels to get the clearest information about what you already do at your program – and how to move forward.
2. **Complete the Meal Observation before starting the audio cast.** This pre-activity will help you consider all that is happening for children at snacks and mealtimes.
3. **Read the Faculty Biographies and Case Studies and the Applying the Information handouts before starting the audio cast.** These handouts are designed to help you prepare for the audio cast and consider how the information faculty share can be applied in your work.
4. **Schedule some time for reflection after the audio cast.** Considering how information applies in your program is an important part of the experience. The Applying the Information section offers questions that help you reflect on what you heard and how you can use it in your practice.

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## Audio Cast Pre-Activity Meal Observation

Even the youngest children communicate through their behavior. At mealtimes, they “tell” their parents and caregivers that they are hungry, they are happy, they like the person they see out the window, that they are full, they do not like applesauce, even that their noses itch! The list of “conversation topics” is endless.

Before participating in the audio cast, observe an infant or toddler during a snack or mealtime in a classroom or a socialization. Focus on one or two behaviors that the young child uses during your observation.

Describe each behavior.

(e.g., Ronnie turns her head when I offer her carrots.)

Next, ask questions to help you understand the behaviors that you have observed. It can help to adopt an attitude of wonder. Use “I wonder . . .” questions to help you understand what you observe:

- **Development:** Where is the child developmentally?  
e.g., “I wonder how Ronnie tells us what she needs?”
- **Temperament:** What do I know about the child’s temperament? How might s/he express that temperament at mealtime?  
e.g., “I wonder how a cautious or shy child like Ronnie might approach new foods at lunchtime?”
- **Physical factors:** Could the child be very hungry/tired/sick today? Are there health issues that impact mealtime in general?  
e.g., “I wonder how Ronnie is feeling today?”
- **Self-regulation:** How does the child express hunger? How does s/he say s/he is full? How does s/he communicate what foods s/he likes or does not like? How does s/he calm him or herself? What tools does the child use to express his or her emotions or needs?  
e.g., “I wonder how Ronnie tells us that she is full?”
- **Environment (physical and social):** What is triggering or reinforcing this behavior in the moment? Does there seem to be a pattern?  
e.g., “I wonder if that mobile is catching Ronnie’s attention? I wonder if Ronnie is reacting to something I am doing?”
- **Home environment:** What do I know/can I learn about the home environment or family mealtime practices that can help me understand this behavior?  
e.g., “I wonder if Ronnie eats carrots at home?”
- **Staff, family and cultural understanding:** How do I/does the family understand or respond to this behavior? How does the wider community respond?

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e.g., “I wonder how Ronnie’s family responds when she turns her head when they offer her food?”

Finally, use the information you gather to come up with possible meanings of the behavior. What messages do you think the child is communicating? How will you respond?

When you have completed the observation, read the Faculty Biographies, review the case studies used during the audio cast, then, start the audio cast.

## **Faculty Biographies and Case Studies**

### **Margot Kaplan-Sanoff, Moderator**



As a child development specialist/special educator, Margot Kaplan-Sanoff has a unique role at the Boston University School of Medicine: she offers residents and pediatricians critical information and training on child behavior and development, relationship-based practice and family centered care. As an Associate Professor of Pediatrics, she has also developed and managed a number of projects focused on sharing information with multidisciplinary audiences on healthy development, infant mental health, early literacy development, and brain development in young children. For two years, Margot also served as a Child Development Content Specialist with the Region I Head Start Quality Initiative. While there, she worked with Steve Shuman on a qualitative study of eating and feeding practices in preschool Head Start programs. An educator, author, and trainer, Margot has particular interest in the social and emotional development of children and strengthening partnerships between parents and health care providers.

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## Steven Shuman



Steve Shuman was the Health Content Specialist with the Head Start Quality Initiative in Region I when he worked with Margot on the qualitative study described above. In that role, Steve drew from a variety of experiences in Head Start, child care, and public health. After graduating college with a degree in education and creative dramatics, Steve began teaching and soon started working specifically with children with disabilities. From there, he found his way to Head Start and child care, providing both administration and training and technical assistance to programs. For over a decade, Steve worked with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. There, he facilitated communication and connections between health care providers, health officials, and staff working with young children and their families. Steve currently serves as a private consultant.

Note: The following case studies provided on the following pages are reports of experiences of faculty. Names and identifying information have been changed to protect family confidentiality.

## Kathy Ford



Twenty-four years ago, Kathy Ford enrolled her three-year-old son in a home-based Head Start program. With time, Kathy's children enrolled in the center-based program. She served as a constant volunteer at the program, in addition to working a full-time job in a nearby nursing home. She got involved in parent groups and Policy Council and, still holding her job, began to substitute in the program. In 1986, she was hired by Head Start as a permanent staff person. Over time, Kathy has served as a Head Start classroom aide, teacher, head teacher and home visitor. Seeking a new challenge, she took a job as a teacher's assistant in an Early Head Start classroom. Currently, Kathy serves as a teacher in an infant classroom where she emphasizes the many abilities of young children. Kathy is the mother of five and grandmother of six.

### **Nathan, 10 months old**

**Setting the stage:** Nathan is a 10-month-old infant who enrolled last month in the infant class at Southern Oregon Early Head Start. Kathy Ford, the teacher in the class, worked with Nathan's mother, Jenna, when his older brother was a preschooler in her Head Start classroom. As she works with Nathan, Kathy follows the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Child and Adult Care Food Program's regulations and requirements for children under one year. The USDA publishes a menu of approved food choices, but requires that children try new foods at home before they are served to them in a center. At the beginning of the year, Kathy and Jenna looked at a menu of possible foods for Nathan, and Jenna identified those foods that he had eaten at home. At pickup and drop off times, Jenna tells Kathy about new foods tried at home, and Kathy tells Jenna about Nathan's eating experiences at the program. Kathy also documents what Nathan has eaten on a daily report that she gives to Jenna at the end of each day. Over the years she has worked with this family, Kathy has learned that at Nathan's home, the family eats dinner together each night. Over the first few weeks that Nathan was in her classroom, Kathy invited Jenna to stay for breakfast, offering her an opportunity to observe Nathan and his mother enjoying a meal together.

This morning, Jenna told Kathy that Nathan had mashed apricots over the weekend. He seemed to like them, she thought. She also brought in a few extra jars of spinach. Spinach is one of Nathan's favorites, and it is on the menu today. Kathy thanks Jenna, but tells her that she cannot accept food from home (other than breast milk) for the children. It is the program's job to provide the food that Nathan needs at the day.

**The meal:** It is lunchtime. Kathy has just helped Nathan wash his hands by taking him to the sink and guiding his hands under water. She adds soap, helps him make lather, and then

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guides his hands back under the water to rinse. He now sits in a low chair with a tray next to a table where the other slightly older children in the class are seated with adults. Kathy sits on one side of Nathan, and Mary, 14 months old, sits on his other side. At lunch, in accordance with USDA requirements, Nathan is offered 3 TBP rice cereal, 2 TBP mashed apricots, and 4 TBP spinach. He also gets 8 ounces of formula in a sippy cup. Kathy observes as she helps the children with their meal. Kathy observes as she spoon feeds Nathan, occasionally using his hand to help guide the spoon. As usual, he eats rapidly. Again, Kathy gets the sense that she cannot feed him fast enough. Before he finishes a bite, his mouth is open and he is gesturing and vocalizing for the next. "You are so hungry, Nathan!" she says. "It's hard for you to finish chewing before you want another bite. You want more spinach?" She waits for him to gesture. "Yummy spinach!" She turns to Mary, "Both you and Nathan like spinach!"

When the spinach is gone, Nathan similarly devours the rice cereal. When it is gone, Kathy reminds Nathan of the apricots on his tray. She offers him a little spoonful. "Pffft," he says, and spits them out. "Mommy thought you liked these, Nathan" she says. She takes her spoon and cleans up the mess on his chin. She offers them to him again. He turns his face to Mary and screams, throwing his spoon on the floor. "Oh, you do not want apricots, Nathan," says Kathy, "All done!" She puts the bowl of apricots on the side of Nathan's tray. "Spoons are for eating, Nathan," she says. She picks up the spoon, puts it aside and hands him a clean one. He knocks the spoon out of her hand and onto the floor. "Spoons are for eating, Nathan," she repeats. "Are you all done with this spoon?" Kathy asks. She picks up the dirty spoon and puts it aside.

Nathan looks again at his bowl of spinach. "AHHHHH!" he says. "You want more spinach," Kathy says. She nods her head. "Let's ask Carol if there is more." Kathy calls Carol, the cook. "Carol, is there any more spinach for Nathan? He wants more spinach." Carol tells Kathy and Nathan that she's sorry. She does not have any more in the kitchen. Kathy shakes her head at Nathan, "The spinach is all gone," she says, "How about some formula?" She offers him the cup. His eyes widen and he grabs at the formula eagerly. He drinks down every drop.

In the meantime, Mary eats a banana, and Nathan watches her hand go to her mouth. When he is done with his cup, he points: "Ahh!" "Oh, Nathan, you're pointing at Mary's banana. Do you want some banana?" Kathy asks. Nathan grunts. Kathy, knowing that Jenna feeds Nathan bananas at home, breaks off a small piece and mashes it with the back of a new spoon. She leaves it on his tray. Nathan grabs it and eagerly thrusts it in his mouth. "More Nathan?" She takes a piece herself. "Yum! Sweet yellow banana. Tastes good!" Kathy talks with the children about the book they read that morning about fruit. "We saw a banana in the Fruit Book this morning!" she says. She offers Nathan another small piece of banana, mashed. This time, Nathan turns his head. "Does that mean you're finished?" she asks. He looks at her. "You're all done, Nathan! You're full!"

For a few minutes, Nathan looks around at the other children at the table. When Mary tries to grab his napkin, he screams. Kathy reminds Mary that that's Nathan's napkin and that she has one. Nathan starts to cry softly, and his head nods. Kathy takes his bib off. "You're sleepy Nathan," she says. As the other children get down to scrape their plates, Kathy takes Nathan back to the sink to wash up for nap.

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## Gloria McGee



For the past eleven years, Gloria McGee has worked for the Early Head Start program at Child Care Associates in Fort Worth, TX. For six years, Gloria worked with infants, toddlers and their families as a classroom teacher. Then, in 2002, she accepted a position as an Early Head Start Family Support Assistant for the home-based program. In 2004, Gloria participated in a plenary panel at the Birth To Three Institute, sharing her focus on the relationships she builds with families as the cornerstone of her practice. She has a CDA credential, and serves as a trainer for the Healthy Marriage Initiative. She is a proud mother and grandmother.

### Tony, 23 months old

**Setting the stage:** Gloria McGee has been home visiting with Tony, 23 months, and his mother, Marion, for eight months. Marion was well into her second trimester with a second baby when she sought Early Head Start services for the family. Millie was born four months ago, and Marion returned to her full time job at a fast food restaurant over two months ago. Tony and Millie's father, Jeremy, also lives with the family, and Marion's mother lives nearby and often comes to help take care of the children.

According to Marion, Tony has always been a "good eater." He has eaten a variety of foods since he started solids, and he has gained weight steadily. Marion reports that Tony never refused any food that was offered him – until recently. In the past few months, though, Marion reports that Tony has been "picky" at meals. Marion tells Gloria, late in a visit, that she is frustrated: "I want to be a good mom. I want Tony to get the food he needs. And then he throws it on the floor!" Gloria assures Marion, "Tony is a toddler! He is learning to make his own decisions. Plus, he's much more interested in playing than he is in eating! But, of course, as his mom, you worry about his eating – and it's frustrating that the food that you brought home is now on the floor." Gloria and Marion make a plan to talk more about it the next week.

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**The visit:** Before they begin talking about mealtimes, Gloria checks in. Millie hasn't been sleeping well, and Marion is tired between lack of sleep and her job. They talk about how that is affecting the family as a whole. Marion has the sense that everyone in the house is fussy, including Tony. After some more discussion about Millie, the conversation turns to Tony.

Gloria comes to the visit prepared with a handout from her home-based curriculum that talks specifically about picky eating. Before pulling out the handout, Gloria asks Marion to describe a mealtime. Marion says that, with the newborn, everyone eats separately, and the adults really eat on the run. Marion makes a different meal for everyone, because everyone seems to eat different foods. Jeremy likes meat and potatoes, Millie isn't eating solids, and Tony likes potato chips and ravioli. She adds, "Tony also loves sweets, but he can't have dessert until he finishes what is on his plate!" Marion says that she usually eats whatever is leftover. As Marion describes the family's eating, Gloria hears a number of food-related issues that she would like to spend some time discussing with Marion. For now, she asks Marion what she would like mealtime to be. Marion isn't sure how to answer, but after some discussion, she says that she remembers that her mom used to have one meal for the family. Dinner was a family time. She wishes they could have family meals. Gloria talks with Marion about all that Tony and Millie would learn in a family meal. She stresses that mealtime is a great time to talk with children – not just about food but about what happened at the day. She stresses it as a time of connection when family members are really busy. But she recognizes that it is hard to find time to cook and be together. She asks Marion how her mother did it. Marion says her mother didn't work full time, but remembers that it was always really busy around the house. She says she is going to ask her mother, and wonders aloud if her mother might want to help. Gloria asks Marion what Jeremy would think. Marion isn't sure. Gloria encourages Marion to talk with Jeremy and to start small. They discuss the possibility of the family making a commitment to eat together at least one meal a week.

Together, Gloria and Marion go over the points on the handout:

1. Young children need food, but small portions. Marion and Gloria talk about how young children can be overwhelmed if they are offered too much food. They talk about offering Tony a little bit of food at a time, rather than an entire plate of food.
2. Toddlers love choices. Gloria reminds Marion of what they discussed last week. Toddlers are gaining independence. They are learning that they can make their own decisions for their bodies. It is the adult's job to offer healthy choices and the child's job to decide what he or she will eat. Marion sighs. She likes the sound of that, but she has tried to offer different kinds of foods for everyone, and she hates when food is wasted. Gloria suggests that, no matter when Jeremy and Tony eat, Marion only cook one meal. She suggests that there be a few food choices for everyone at meals, and encourages Marion to let Tony choose what he will eat of those. They plan to talk about menu planning at a later visit.

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3. Offer a variety of foods over the week. Gloria tells her that a toddler's favorite today might not be his favorite tomorrow! Marion smiles. She says that Tony used to love green beans. She continues to serve them to him, even though he hasn't eaten them in a few months. They talk about how it is important to offer many different kinds of things for children to try. If they stop liking a food, stop offering it for awhile.

Marion tells Gloria that what frustrates her most is when Tony throws food on the floor that someone else can eat. Gloria says that she imagines that that can be very aggravating, and certainly does not make for a relaxing mealtime! Gloria reminds Marion that young children communicate with their behaviors. Tony uses lots of words, but he is still learning to express everything he wants to say. What does Marion think Tony is trying to say when he throws food? Marion laughs, "Oh, he is trying to aggravate me." Gloria laughs too. "It is aggravating, but I doubt that is what he is trying to do. Why don't I come next week at lunch time? I'll bring my own lunch, but maybe we can watch Tony together, and see if we can figure out what he is trying to say?" Marion thinks that would be OK. Gloria puts it on her calendar.

In the meantime, they make a plan. Over the next week, Marion will offer Tony a few new foods, mixed in with some favorites. She will give him a limited choice for what he eats. She will try and spend some of each meal talking with him about his day. When Gloria leaves, she makes a special note to herself to make sure that they spend some time on healthy food choices, menu planning, and self-regulation in the weeks to come.