

## Frequently Asked Questions About Our Food Program

### **What is the food program?**

Our food program encompasses not only the USDA nutritional guidelines and standards for feeding young children, but also includes the whole mealtime process and how children are fed as well. We support the goals set out by the USDA including encouraging children to eat a variety of foods, with emphasis on more fruits, vegetables, grains and calcium rich foods. (USDA, 2010) We believe that once children's basic needs are met, they can move on to fulfilling secondary needs and are better able to focus, explore and learn. Mealtimes are part of our curriculum offering motor, cognitive, language and social opportunities to children. We provide all food for children and develop mealtime routines that foster a lifelong positive relationship with eating and food. Our offerings are nutritious and varied, giving children choices and exposing them to many different items.

### **How do infants fit into the program?**

From the beginning, children develop feelings and emotions surrounding eating. Feeding infants should be an activity that not only offers sustenance, but enhances attachment and fosters a sense of security. The messages conveyed during these times are as important as the food itself. Without them, "food won't be enough to foster a child's emotional, or even physical, growth." (Brazelton, 1992, p.286) Infant teachers work with parents to develop individualized feeding plans for children to promote consistency between home and school, and to decide when and how children transition to food. Formula, organic cereal and organic baby food is provided for every child until they are eating off of the main menu.

### **What if my child has differing food needs?**

Cultural, religious and health issues are discussed among families, teachers and the cook. Comparable substitutes are offered to children with varying needs. Teachers work with families to bridge differences in feeding and eating styles and beliefs so that children feel comfortable at mealtimes. Constant communication between teachers and families is vital to success at these times. Teachers can learn what values and beliefs are important to families and replicate them for the children in their care. "Maintaining consistency between how children are fed at home and at the center respects the family's culture and traditions and further nurtures positive attachment at an early age." (Branscomb and Goble, 2008, p.28)

### **What if my child does not eat what is offered?**

Parents and teachers alike worry when children do not seem to be eating enough. Young children are actually quite self regulatory, perhaps not eating the same amounts daily, but when taken over time, caloric intake is remarkably constant. (Roberts and Heyman, 2000) Of importance here is to offer healthy and varied choices. Our menus reflect this and our routines allow children the flexibility to have some control over what and how much they eat. Young children are also prone to refuse new things, but with repeated exposure can grow to accept them. Familiarity is an important factor in determining preferences and a young child may need to have between 10 and 15 exposures to a food item before being willing to try it. (Birch, Johnson and Fisher, 1995) Again, our menus offer repeated exposure to items and our mealtimes encourage children to try foods and keep mealtimes positive. Teachers work with families to identify the factors in preventing children from eating at the center and work to develop strategies accordingly.