

Turning Snack Time Into Language With Food

Kaitlin Dean, B.S. (M.Ed Candidate)

Ashley Parry, B.S. (M.Ed Candidate)

Lauri Nelson, Ph.D.

Introduction

Snack time can be transformed into a language-rich environment that supports language development for all children, especially those who are deaf or hard of hearing. By embedding language-focused goals into natural routines, snack time offers valuable opportunities to reinforce social interactions, auditory perception, and academic skills, both at home and in the classroom. When parents and care providers use daily routines as the context for a child's developmental interventions, they can integrate them into natural activities without disrupting the flow of what children are doing and learning.

Considerations

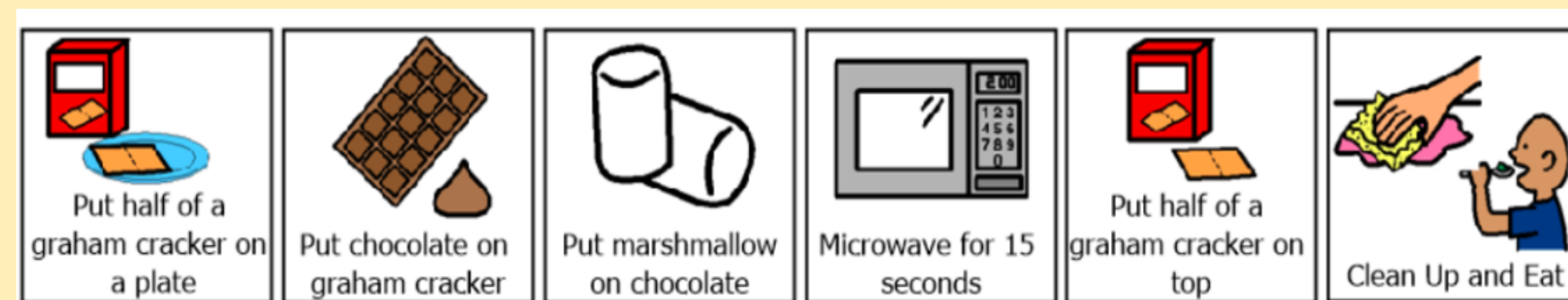
- How can you foster meaningful language learning opportunities during snack time?
- Can you think of any books that tie into the snack you're preparing that encourage the child to engage with the food?
- How might you introduce new vocabulary related to the snack?
- What strategies could you use to expand your child's responses during snack time?
- How might siblings and other family members be involved?

Kids As Chefs



Engaging children in food preparation encourages them to communicate, follow directions, and practice vocabulary related to cooking, food, and emotions. To increase language opportunities, parents, teachers, and caregivers can involve children by having them describe the steps of the recipe, name ingredients, work together to plan the steps, or even role-play as "chefs" giving instructions to their peers. When children take on the roles of a chef, they enhance their language skills in a playful, hands-on way.

Visual Recipe:



Connecting Food To Books

By connecting popular children's books, caregivers can encourage vocabulary building, social interaction, and listening skills. For example, while reading *The Little Red Hen*, children can practice sequencing and discuss cause and effect, while *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* can spark conversations about choices and consequences. Books for younger readers such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* provide opportunities to reinforce concepts like colors and animals. Integrating these themed activities into snack time helps develop language skills in a natural, engaging way.



- How can you encourage your child to use new words or concepts learned from a book while they eat?
- How can you incorporate a book's themes to encourage your child to ask and answer questions during snack time?

Snack-Driven Conversation

Having snack-driven conversations with children is a simple yet effective way to promote language learning. As children munch on their snacks, you can engage them by asking questions about the taste, texture, and colors of the food. Encouraging children to describe their favorite snacks or share stories about foods can also expand their vocabulary. These relaxed, snack-time conversations provide a natural opportunity for children to practice using new words, forming sentences, and improving their communication skills in a fun and informal setting.

Potential Targets:

- Vocabulary
- Conversational skills
- Labeling food
- Asking and answering questions
- Action words
- Descriptive language
- Storytelling and imagination
- Counting and sequencing



A language rich environment means giving the children every opportunity possible to hear and use language throughout the activity or routine.

Snack activities do not need to be elaborate or expensive to be an effective, goal-oriented activity.

A child can only acquire the words he hears spoken around him.

The quantity and quality of talking, interacting, and reading with a child in the first three years of life are strongly associated with language and cognitive development.



Emma Eccles Jones
College of Education & Human Services
UtahStateUniversity

Communicative Disorders & Deaf Education