



Creating a Comfortable Cafeteria

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Obtaining Administrative 'Buy-in'

What if I don't have a very approachable principal or flexible administration?

- Sometimes it takes time to educate administration on the benefits of programs such as Comfortable Cafeteria. Schedule a short meeting with the principal in order to give him/her a copy of the Comfortable Cafeteria Information Brief and review information about the program and outcomes.
- Show the principal the Every Moment Counts website and review the Comfortable Cafeteria tab with all of the resources and video vignettes. Watch the video, 'Here's what a principal has to say about it.' Mentally healthy students do better academically and have fewer behavior problems in a positive environment!

Scheduling Issues

Won't implementing this program decrease my productivity? How will I get all my IEP minutes covered? I'm already too busy!

- If IEPs are written to allow flexibility in the location of service provision and the goals can be targeted during the lunchtime, then services can fulfill IEP minutes.
- Students seen for therapy in a group setting such as the lunchroom can provide the OT/other professional with additional time in their schedule, depending on what the district allows.
- Make the case that providing services in the LRE (Least Restrictive Environment) is the law (IDEA) and that students learn skills best in natural environments. Fostering appropriate mealtime manners, conversation skills and social skills are important life skills that can be promoted during lunch.
- Having a fieldwork or practicum student is an ideal way to obtain additional help when implementing the Comfortable Cafeteria program. Students are an extra set of hands and can often plan and implement the program with their supervisor's support.

Obtaining Cafeteria Supervisor 'Buy-in'

What if the cafeteria supervisors don't want to or feel comfortable changing their approach?

- Obtaining administrative buy-in prior to approaching the cafeteria supervisors is important for ensuring that the supervisors are aware that the principal has endorsed the program.
- During the initial meeting with the cafeteria supervisors, make a point to tell them that you are there to support them in their role. Cafeteria Supervisors are often frustrated and would like to do a better job but have never been provided the information and support needed to create a positive social environment. Ask them about their biggest challenges and needs. Let them know that you are there to help make their jobs easier and more enjoyable.
- Talk about how you will help teach students how to be a good friend, have positive mealtime conversations and include everyone. Let them know that from our experience, students love the Comfortable Cafeteria program and that it helps them be safer, happier and easier to supervise.

Is There Flexibility in how the Program is Implemented?

Do we have to follow the program in the exact order in which it is presented on the website?

- No. Remember to make the program work for you and your situation. Be creative and make the program your own! It can often be provided in conjunction with other programs such as a school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)/ Bully Prevention and Character programs.
- When replicating the Comfortable Cafeteria program consider the lessons on friendship and conversations build upon each other. However, if noise, for example, is identified as a major problem, and is interfering with teaching the other lessons, it might make sense to start with the sensory week, normally taught during week 5. This can help students understand the impact of their voices on others.
- What if we have to skip a week because of time off of school? No problem. Although consecutive weeks are optimal, weeks can be skipped because of a schedule conflict. Simply review the prior week's lesson before continuing with the new lesson/activity. This reinforces the message from prior weeks. The program is flexible enough so that if you feel that one lesson per month is what is manageable then that may work as well.

Who can Implement the Program?

Does the OT always have to be the person to provide the Comfortable Cafeteria program?

- No. Although this program was developed by occupational therapists who have a background in mealtime function, social participation and sensory processing, other school professionals may easily provide the program after carefully studying the materials on the Every Moment Counts website. Recommended professionals include Speech Language Pathologists, health educators, PE teachers, and school counselors to name a few.

Start Small

Do I offer the program for each grade level in the school? There are so many students!

- Start with one small group, one classroom or one grade level depending on the size of your school and what you think you can manage. The program was designed with primary grade students in mind because they can understand the basic concepts presented and in most cases have not yet developed negative judgments or discrimination against other students. Offering the program with the younger grade students will help them learn important skills/lessons (how to be a good friend, including others, how to have a mealtime conversation) that can be reinforced in successive grades. Remember that the best way to prevent bullying is to promote friendship!

Space Issues

What if our space is too large for the way the program is written?

- Because the program involves sharing information to the students in a short 'lesson', if the cafeteria is not conducive to presenting to a large group, teachers can be approached to share the information in their classroom prior to that week's activity. Some OTs have used a microphone in the cafeteria to share the mini-lesson. With advanced planning and permission you can be creative in sharing the 'weekly theme' in other ways such as assemblies or the morning announcements.
- If a large scale implementation is not realistic, a small group such as a "Lunch Bunch" consisting of peers and students with special needs may allow you to target the most vulnerable population in a smaller room.

Parent Permission

Do we need to get written permission from parents to implement these programs?

- If the principal has approved and supported implementation, there is no need for specific parental permission because the program will be considered part of the regular curriculum. However, make sure to inform parents several weeks prior to the program initiation by sending home the Comfortable Cafeteria Marketing Flyer.



How Much Does it Cost to Implement the Program?

What if we don't have extra funds to pay for things like printing handouts, and laminating posters or food/other props?

- The Supervisors' handouts can be emailed to those who have Internet access, which will minimize the need to make paper copies.
- Many schools have laminating machines that can be used to laminate the Cafeteria Posters to help them hold up over time.
- Approach the PTO or PTA organization and request that they raise funds to cover the costs of the 'healthy foods' provided during Week 6's healthy food tasting day!
- Some local organizations offer discounts or donations to schools when asked. A local grocer might eagerly contribute to this good cause and also benefit with a tax write-off.



Sustainability

What should I do after I complete the program?

- Make sure to stop in the cafeteria every so often (1-2 times/month) to see how the students and supervisors are doing. Consider yourself a coach in helping maintain positive changes in the students' participation and enjoyment in the cafeteria and the supervisors' interactions with the students. Provide ongoing suggestions for reinforcing the weekly themes. Refer to the Every Moment Count's Pinterest site for additional cafeteria ideas for maintaining a positive environment.
- There are suggestions in the "Just Do IT-The Six Week Program Detail" handouts that include how to extrapolate the concepts to older students who might need a refresher or may be learning these concepts for the first time under these programs. Be creative in how to best teach students based on age, cultural diversity and abilities.



Can This Program be Provided Outside of School Settings?

- Yes. Other settings such as lunch or snack time during camps, day care centers, or after school clubs can implement activities that are embedded in the Comfortable Cafeteria program.