

16 - National Child and Adult Care Food Program Week

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Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Hello everyone, and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Twice a month, we come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to try.

Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast to get notifications about future episodes. I am so excited for today. Today, we have the opportunity to speak to one of our very own students at the University of Arizona Global Campus, Jennifer Ramirez.

Jennifer, welcome.

Jennifer Ramirez Speaker: Hi, thank you for having me.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: So, Jennifer's been in the early childhood field for over 17 years, and she's worked in a center and every position from assistant teacher to executive director.

Most recently, she worked in a childcare assistance program and the child and adult care food program. She has her bachelor's degree in cognitive studies from Asher University College of Education and is currently halfway through her graduate degree in early childhood education leadership at UGAC, UAGC, excuse me. She holds a paraprofessional license and a substitute teaching license with the state of Illinois, and I am thrilled to have her here today.

Jennifer's title is the National Child and Adult Care Food Program. We are coming upon the National Child Care and Food Program Week. Jennifer, can you tell us a little bit about this program?

Jennifer Ramirez Speaker: Absolutely, I would love to.

So, the week of March 14th is National Child and Adult Care Food Program, also called CACFP. So, what this program is, it is a funded program that helps reimburse childcare providers for the cost of food that they're serving to the children in their care. So, the goal of this is to make sure the providers are educated enough that they're serving nutritious meals to the students, and then still getting reimbursed for that.

So, as we know, most kids eat the majority of their meals in childcare. If you think about how long a parent's workday is, plus travel time, kids really eat breakfast, lunch, snacks, and childcare. Some even eat dinner, and what this program does is it makes sure that the kids are getting nutritious meals, and the providers are getting reimbursed for these meals.

So, since it's something they're already doing, you might as well take advantage and get reimbursed for it.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Perfect. So, Jennifer, how do childcare providers find out about this program? Where do they go, and do you do any trainings on the program?

Jennifer Ramirez Speaker: Those are all great questions.

So, since this is a national program, there is a website they have, which is CACFP.org. Sorry about that. CACFP.org, and on that website, there's several things you can find. So, there's a ton of resources on that website that you can get to educate yourself, to educate your families, to help you do meal planning.

There's resources and activities you can download for the kids in your care, as well, but there's also a section that's called a sponsor section. So, what a sponsor is is an organization that kind of acts as a third party to help you monitor the meals you're giving, monitor the attendance of the kids, make sure those meals are nutritious, provide you that hands-on training that you would need, and then provides that reimbursement for you. So, regardless of where you're located, if you're a family childcare provider or a provider for a childcare center, you can log on to CACFP.org. You can find the Find My Sponsor.

You can put in your area, and they will give you a list of organizations that are a food program sponsor, and they can sign you up for their program and help you get started.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Jennifer, this is an important week, as you spoke about. Can you tell us a little bit more what happens during this week?

Jennifer Ramirez Speaker: Absolutely.

So, this week is really about educating people about the program. So, there's so many benefits to children and providers. So, everyone who is a sponsor really spends this week getting the information out there.

So, to those who are new to the program, who those may have never heard of the program before, and we really want to let them know what those benefits are. So, some of the benefits for children, as I spoke about, are they're getting nutritious meals, but you're also helping them to install good eating habits and introducing new foods to them as well, because sometimes parents are in such a rush to make that last meal of the day or not being familiar with new foods themselves. You tend to eat the same things over and over again, and this will really help kids get a whole brand new perspective on food, and it's important to install those good eating habits now because eventually these kids will be older, and when they're going into the fridge picking their own snack, you really want them to be able to be comfortable enough to pick those grapes and strawberries versus those potato chips or cookies.

And then there's so many providers, so many benefits for providers, like I mentioned, the meal reimbursement, and that you can get for kids in your care from infants up to 12 years old. You can get reimbursed for two meals and a snack a day. You get cash reimbursement, so you can take that cash back to the grocery store to buy more meals.

You learn how to provide nutritious meals, and you become part of a national organization that really supports its members.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: This is just great information. I'm trying to write down things as fast as I can.

You kind of touched on this already, but we have a lot of listeners that probably have a daycare or thinking about opening up a childcare center or something to that extent. Do you have any tips for them on planning meals for children, like how to do it? And I know you said that there's resources, but do you have any quick tips on choosing good foods when they go to the grocery store for their children they're caring for?

Jennifer Ramirez Speaker: Absolutely. So, my recommendation is to always learn how to read a food label.

There's so much information on a food label, and that can really make the difference between picking something that's healthy for you and picking something that just looks healthy, right? So, if you go to this website, CACFP.org, they actually have a training on there that can teach you how to read a food label. And then this way, when you're going to the store, you're more knowledgeable about what you're actually grabbing. And when you're picking a cereal for breakfast, you're not picking one that's loaded with sugars.

You're picking one that's actually within an allowable sugar content to still be considered healthy.

Dr. Stephanie Heald: Jennifer, that's so useful. I know I have a 15 and a 17-year-old, and my 17-year-old is really working on healthy eating choices to gain weight.

So, I want to check that out with him. The grocery store can be daunting at times because like you said, those food labels are just, it might look like a healthy choice, but when you dive down deeper, it's not. So, Jennifer, do you have three takeaways that our listeners can walk away today with?

Jennifer Ramirez Speaker: Absolutely.

So, my first takeaway would be to use the resources that are available to you. Even if you're not interested in being part of the CACFP program, for whatever reason that may be, you can still go to the website and get a ton of free resources to try to make sure the meals you're providing are nutritious. So that would be my takeaway, number one.

Number two would be to remember serving nutritious meals to children now will set the stage for healthier foods they choose to eat as they grow up. And number three would be to remember children need to be offered a new food as many as 15 times before they will actually try it. So that is a lot more than what we would ever think and would want to make something for someone who's not going to eat it.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: So, there might be a chance that my 15-year-old will like salad, Jennifer.

Jennifer Ramirez Speaker: Maybe, don't give up hope yet.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Well, Jennifer, I loved all of this just because I have a nephew who's two and he's in a daycare and she is stellar at having them try different things and makes them all sorts of stuff to eat.

And I do believe she's a part of this program. It's just so neat to see that early childhood people can totally change the way a child looks at food and if they want to try it and things like that.

So, as we wrap up, do you have a challenge for our listeners today that you want them to walk away with?

Jennifer Ramirez Speaker: Absolutely.

So, if you are a childcare provider or interested in being a childcare provider, I challenge you to go to the CACFP website. Even if you're not interested in right now joining and finding a sponsor, I challenge you to go to the website, look at the information they have and look at all the great things they have on that website and that they can offer you. And if you are a parent, I challenge you to ask your childcare provider if they are a part of this program.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Those are wonderful challenges. And Jennifer, again, thank you so much for being here today. I know that our listeners are going to take this information and run with it and I hope that they do because this is awesome for them.

So, thank you for being here. Thank you for listening today and we will see you in a couple of weeks.