

“Servant Meal”

A team building activity to heighten facilitators’ perception skills in regard to the needs of others—physically and emotionally.

AT A GLANCE

- Participants sit together at a meal table.
- People will be serving each other all the components of the meal.
- You are not allowed to take or ask for what you want.
- You will have a post-meal discussion over dessert.

SET UP

- Make the meal family-style (aka not buffet) with all elements on the table for serving.
- Plan a multi-part meal (tacos, build your own wraps, salad bar, etc.).
- Prepare for a longer mealtime + debrief time (don’t have anywhere you need to go right after the meal).
- You may need some extra clean-up effort, depending on everyone’s serving skills!
- Prepare/plan a nice dessert for the debrief.

FRONTLOAD

- To setup for success, you will need to give some clear instructions.
- **“For this entire meal, you may not serve yourself any food, drink, or condiment”.**
- **“You can feed yourself or drink your beverage yourself, but only if there’s food on your plate and liquid in your glass”.**
- **“The person to your left is completely in charge of your needs for this meal – they should be getting you what you need”.** You don’t want to say more than that for this instruction. You don’t want to right away give everyone the solution that the person to your left should *ask you for what you want*. Everything in here should lead to some powerful conversation later if you pay close attention to how behaviors develop through the meal. Families with younger children might think about how they arrange seating!

- Then you can add: **“The only thing you can do for yourself is go to the bathroom. You don’t have to rely on your server person to handle that for you.”** 😊
- **“You cannot prompt your server to serve you. For instance, no one may say things like ‘Boy, that corn looks really good!’ or ‘I sure am thirsty’”.** Pay close attention early on in the meal to enforce this rule with kind reminders. It can be a powerful conversation later about what happens when someone can’t, doesn’t, or won’t ask for what they need.

START THE MEAL

- After a rules review, it’s time to start the meal. If you have family meal rituals like the saying of grace, a blessing, or a toast, let that be the official commencement of serving each other. If you have a typical “gobble, gulp, and go” mealtime routine, try a simple handholding around the table and an acknowledgement of thanks to all for being willing to try this game, or for having contributed to the preparation of the meal—another exercise in team building—and then you’re off!

WHAT TO WATCH FOR/INTERVENTION POINTS

- Who immediately jumped into action? When you said “go”, what was it like? Who decided it was time to serve their person or who stood back and observed a little bit?
- How were people being provided their needs? What was the conversation like back and forth?
- Was there a sense of gratitude from the serve-ee? Was it a conversation or was it just a decision that the server on their own to replenish the water glass?
- What happened after a person was finished their first helping? When the plate was empty, did the server forget to re-ask the if served if they would like more?
- Watch for those who have abandoned their partners. It’s best not to intervene—to let the experience happen organically and talk about it in the debrief—but sometimes it happens. Here are some ways to address it:
 - Give general prompts to the table: **“How is your partner doing?”**

- Give a “knowing look” or walk over to a server and give them a subtle prompt to be aware of their partner’s needs. **“Hey, Jesse may need some more water.” “I notice that Jesse doesn’t have any salad. You might want to ask him if he’d like some.”**

DEBRIEF (OVER DESSERT)

- Like any team building activity—and your kids do this at Holiday Hill—it’s important to take some time to reflect on what we just went through. It’s best to do this over dessert. ***Let them serve themselves dessert*** so they don’t have to worry about it during the debrief. Here are some questions that you can use to spark the conversation:
 - **“What was it like not being able to serve yourself?”**
 - **“What was something unexpected that happened?”**
 - **“Did we see anyone do something creative?”**
 - **“Did that catch on?”**
 - **“What was it like mentally trying to serve someone while waiting for someone to serve you?”**
 - **“What’s different about this kind of serving and the way we usually work together?”**
 - **How else might we look out for each other’s needs in the future?**

EXTENSION

We hope this activity gives your group members new perspectives on what it takes to serve each other for the greater good. Wouldn’t it be nice if we all looked out for each other a little more? Through being a little uncomfortable or a little bit hungry that might make it a little more memorable. It can give everyone some great context and you some great talking points as you go forward if you need to remind them of this experience to keep them accountable for serving each other in the future.