How do child care providers and Head Start teachers understand mealtimes with preschool-aged children and what are their goals for mealtimes?

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The child care providers and Head Start teachers in our sample discussed three main categories of goals for children during mealtimes.

### 1. Eating Enough Healthy Foods

**Encourage Eating**
- "Every meal! I serve every food group... So I’ll talk about why our body needs the peas or watermelon. What vitamins or minerals are in it and what they do for our body – I try to teach them why we need to eat these... I’m trying to educate and open their horizons so they’re more open to tasting all of the different flavors." (Home-Based Provider)

**Role Modeling**
- "It’s just role modeling what we’re doing. We can have them see how others are eating. If we are not eating what we are serving, then they won’t eat it either. We talk about why it’s important to have all the food – like I’m eating it. It’s really tasty. So this helps my bones. This helps my eyes. That kind of stuff we talk about. And then they usually eat it." (Home-Based Provider)

**Positive Relationship with Food**
- "Really just a positive attitude towards food and eating, and... I just want them to have a positive relationship with food... Well, just having an idea of how much makes them full, not eating too much, eating ‘til they’re satisfied, but not overeating. I don’t make them finish their food." (Home-Based Provider)

**Eating Healthy Foods**
- "The first way would be offering all the food groups at every meal... put it on their plates so they see what a healthy plate looks like to be eating. Offer them as many seconds of fruits and vegetables as they want. We do read books about being healthy, being active, being healthy, and then also books about different fruits and vegetables." (Home-Based Provider)

### 2. Learning Mealtime Etiquette

**Cleaning**
- "the fine motor aspect of feeding themselves and serving themselves, the independence of being able to serve themselves and feed themselves. And then they also, they really enjoy when they get to dump their plates, ... go to the sink and they rinse off their plates and then put it into the bucket. And they really enjoy having those responsibilities and everything." (Head Start Teacher)

**Learning Table Manners**
- "It’s the social aspect. It’s learning manners, learning what’s appropriate, finding out about your friends... We do a little bit of manners training, also – please and thank you and stuff that everybody needs to learn." (Home-Based Provider)

**Learning to Use Utensils**
- "It teaches fine motor skills by opening up their own milk cartoons. Using the forks. Stiring their own food. There’s fine motor, there’s lots of language going on at the table because we sit and we talk." (Head Start Teacher)

### 3. Building Relationships / Social-Emotional Development

**Relationship Building**
- "They’re having conversation around the table with each other, learning from each other, sharing interests, likes, dislikes, what they did yesterday or what they’re gonna do tomorrow" (Head Start Teacher)

**Talking with Children**
- "Like, we talk about families and things like that, so I guess it’s just fun to see their opinions about things and see what it is that they’re interested in talking about other than things we initiate and facilitate, but I think that’s my favorite part about mealtimes is that we get to sit down and really discuss with them about things that they want to talk about or things that they begin to talk about with their friends." (Center-Based Provider)

**Topic of Conversation [Center]**
- "Just the opportunity to be able to promote the healthy eating and quantities, portions and sizes. We don’t only talk about that at our mealtimes. For instance, we’ve been talking about healthy or something. We’ll do our muscles." (Center-Based Provider)

**Topic of Conversation [Home]**
- "It’s really relaxed. It’s just to hear what they have to say about – you know, that’s when we talk about more about family stuff, their family, their siblings, their parents. It’s just fun to hear what they say because it’s nothing structured or nothing – the mealtime is regularly structured, but the conversation is not." (Home-Based Provider)

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