In School meal observer training plan

Introduce the purpose of in-school observations

The objective of in school observations is to:

Observe what children participating in the study eat

Record food choices, spillages and swops

Collect sample meals to weigh average portions served for school dinners

Weigh foods included in packed lunches (wearing gloves, aprons etc)

Collect individual children's leftover foods to weigh and record

Observers should not:

Influence the child's choice of food

React to healthy or unhealthy choices

Praise the child for clearing their plate

Practical training

School lunchtime experience

It is useful for the observers to experience the noise and hectic nature of the school lunchtime environment before they go out to do the observations.

A school lunchtime visit can be used to observe the process by which the children are served, identify where children taking packed lunch / school meals sit and to identifying likely stations for each observer.

Most importantly the visit can be used to introduce the observers to the school dinner staff and to explain the purpose of the study.

Practical experience measuring foods

Likewise it is useful for the observers to have practice measuring foods before they have to do it under the time pressure which goes along with school dinnertimes

For this you will need:

Foods –   including separate items such as chicken nuggets, chips, baked beans and also items which become mixed such as casserole and rice, spaghetti bolognaise and cake and custard

School dinner trays (if possible)

Sample packed lunch boxes

Electronic scales with a tare function

Bowls

Spoons and spatulas

Task 1 - Practicing measuring foods

Separating out foods to get individual weights of items:

As served on school dinner tray

From foods leftover on a school dinner tray

As served in packaged lunch

From foods leftover in a packed lunch

Discussion of which foods it is most difficult to separate and possible alternatives.

Task 2 - Tests on proportions of difficult to separate foods.

Prepare mixtures of foods eg casserole and rice, spaghetti and bolognaise, cake and custard of know proportions.

Prepare some foods to resemble the way they would be served and some smaller portions to represent how a child's leftovers may look.

Get the observers to estimate the proportions of each food in the mixture.

Repeat this getting the observers to make up portions without telling the others the proportions of each food.