

Reggie's Rainbow Adventure[®]



Discussion Guide: Feed The Spirit

**National Kidney Foundation of Michigan's
nutrition education program for disease prevention
in the early childcare setting**

Feed the Spirit

A Family Activity

ENJOY EATING? Like to share with friends? Then, you're going to love this activity about the intersection between food and family life.

Here's the background: The National Kidney Foundation of Michigan knows that America's wellbeing depends on encouraging healthy eating and active movement throughout life, starting at an early age. That's the core message of our Regie's Rainbow Adventure® program as we invite children in their preschool classrooms to imaginatively travel with our superhero all the way from the Island of Red to the Island of Purple. As they read our Regie picture books and enjoy the related activities, kids taste samples of colorful fruits and vegetables with their teachers. Then, most importantly, they carry that new enthusiasm home with them. As they are learning about nutritious and delicious foods, children also are working on a range of early-childhood learning priorities with their teachers' encouragement. That includes basic literacy, lessons with numbers, letters and colors—as well as the need to reduce the amount of passive “screen time” kids are tempted to fall into.

This Discussion Guide is one in a series of guides to help you explore six books about innovative early-learning programs, including our work with Regie. Now more than ever, such efforts need to be lifted up and encouraged nationwide. In recent years, United Way for Southeastern Michigan has been proud to highlight these six programs because we know they work! Rigorous evaluation proves that they shape children's lives and the entire community in positive ways.

So, we know Regie works! We know these activities are fun—and tasty, too! Please, invite some friends to join you. We hope to share these free Discussion Guides coast to coast. So, let's talk!

Step 1 is inviting people to discuss what we are presenting to readers in these books.

Get a copy of the colorful Regie book. People will want to look at that cover with a little boy giving our superhero a big hug. Then ask something like this: “Can we talk about a fresh idea I've discovered that's part of this program called Regie's Rainbow Adventure? Kids love it. The whole family could get involved in this activity. We could take these ideas they're providing and use them or adapt them to fit our needs—right here where we live.”

Are you confronting especially difficult challenges in your neighborhood? You should know that all six of these books—including the Regie program—originated in neighborhoods wrestling with the impact of poverty, low rates of literacy and recent immigration. Our metro-Detroit region has become nationally known for the creative—and effective—responses by the talented professionals working for nonprofits focused on early childhood issues. We're finding solutions that can work for you, too.

Who might join the discussion? Look around you. Did you know that millions of small groups meet every week across the United States? Group settings include congregations, schools, libraries, civic centers, coffee shops, and individuals' homes. The intentions of these groups range from religious to recreational, from educational to purely social. Whatever their purpose, a universal custom in these groups is sharing food. Participants in some groups describe this as “providing the snacks” while other groups intentionally gather to enjoy a meal together. That's why this *Feed the Spirit* activity is such a good fit for many small groups. We all love to eat when we get together with friends!

How do you get the conversation started? Use any of the language in this Discussion Guide to get people excited. You can reproduce sections of this text in an email, a flier or as notes to share in person with your group. Point out: “We all enjoy eating. We like sharing what we cook. We all agree on that. This new activity adds some interesting ways we can celebrate what we love best from our home kitchens.”

Remind your friends: Food is a universal cornerstone for our families and our whole community. We honor our ancestors and commemorate our shared histories through food. Eating is far more than simply a series of daily habits as we gobble up our breakfast, lunch and dinner. Our food traditions and our favorite family dishes are symbols of our shared values.

Remember: This is just one in a series of guides. As this series of guides expands, you’ll find more issues to discuss—along with additional group activities we will be suggesting. Look at the last page of this discussion guide for a complete list of all six books and upcoming guides. Some guides are finished; more are coming. Plus: We’d love to hear your questions and ideas for spreading this news.



Regie welcomes children during a National Kidney Foundation of Michigan activity

Learn more and download at:
www.PlaceHolder.org

As You Plan Your Discussion

You might find it easy to convince friends to try this activity with relatively little discussion ahead of time. Or, you may be part of a group that prefers some thoughtful background reading to enrich the experience before you proceed with the activity. Either approach is fine.

For participants who care to know more, consider sharing some of the following:

Why does food break through social barriers and get people talking?

- It's a beloved, basic part of daily life;
- Food activates all five senses;
- Food memories tap deep into our family and community heritage.

Nearly two centuries ago, the great French food writer Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin put it simply: "Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are." That's as true today as when he published his groundbreaking book *The Psychology of Taste*. An enthusiastic advocate of home cooking as a sign of true hospitality, Brillat-Savarin argued that discovering another family's favorite dish is one of life's great wonders. "The discovery of a new dish confers more happiness on humanity than the discovery of a new star," he liked to say. In other words, the basic idea behind this guide—sharing our family food traditions—is an age-old, sure-fire activity.

Early scholars studying the natural sciences were drawn to this idea from the beginning. Learning about food traditions is key to understanding cultures, countries and the entire global community. In the 1960s, the French historian Fernand Braudel surprised his scholarly colleagues by devoting a major portion of his massive series of books, *Civilization and Capitalism*, to the foods and culinary customs of ordinary Europeans since the 15th century. In his volume, *The Structures of Everyday Life*, Braudel explained that food preparation was key to the development of successful communities. Today, the exploration of food traditions is a common discipline in sociology, anthropology, ethnography and public health.

You will have a richer experience with this activity if you start with a copy of the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan book. Its full title and subtitle is: *Regie's Rainbow Adventure—National Kidney Foundation of Michigan's nutrition education program for disease prevention in the early childcare setting*. Available through Amazon, Barnes & Noble and other online retailers (ISBN: 978-1942011644) this book includes inspiring stories involving educators, parents and children. Word of warning: You're likely to fall in love with the green-haired, broccoli-shaped superhero Regie and want to bring him to your community. Fortunately, Regie's sponsors are working right now to scale this program nationwide. So, Regie could wind up coming to a location near you.

If your participants enjoy reading, consider sharing with them the Preface to our book, written by Morris W. Hood III, a member of the Michigan Senate and a strong supporter of the Regie program. In his Preface, the senator describes how nutrition and our family food traditions are essential pillars in a healthy community. With that Preface, you can also show participants a delightful color photo of the senator showing off his Regie hand puppet!

**Learn more and download at:
www.PlaceHolder.org**

Getting started

Adapting this idea? Please, share your innovation with us.

If you are a veteran of small groups, you may want to develop your own approach to this activity, tailored to the experiences and needs of your own community. If you raise fresh questions that touch off lively and helpful discussions, please get in touch with us and share your thoughts. These books—and the accompanying Discussion Guides—were published to encourage conversations coast to coast. We would like to hear about your fresh ideas.

Here are some ways you could start this process:

BEGIN by orienting your group to the book—the overall story behind this group activity. That’s most effective if you can describe the book and this activity in your own words. Something about this inspired you. Share that excitement directly with your friends. If you want to read aloud from a passage of the book, look at page 54 where Maria Houroian describes her enjoyment of her grandmother’s greens, cooked fresh from the garden. The passage begins, “What we’re teaching children today are the lessons I was taught by my nona—my grandmother who came from Italy when I was young.” Maria even shares her nona’s recipe. That’s the kind of experience you’re inviting participants to enjoy—bringing this kind of story and family recipe to share with others.

If your group is relatively small, you can share your stories with everyone in a single circle. This activity also has been used as a workshop session at conferences with very large groups of 50 or more people. Then, you should divide into smaller circles to give more people an opportunity to talk. It’s useful to do this by “numbering off,” which usually has the effect of separating spouses and friends into different small groups and ensures a diversity of stories in each circle. What’s an ideal circle size? We’ve found this works best with four to six people per group.

THE QUESTION: One way to get people to start talking is by asking, “What’s your *taste of home*? What do you think of when you hear that phrase? What flavor or food do you associate right away with your best memories of family life? We invite you, now, to tell the people around you about a food that makes you think about home and your family traditions. The food you describe might connect generations in your family and may reflect your ethnic heritage. Or, the food might be a fond memory of home because of the way it was prepared, the season in which it was eaten, or the circle of people who enjoyed it with you.”

If you have a large number of people divided into small groups, you might add: “In each small group, please choose one person who will summarize one of your stories, when we reassemble the whole group.”

Want to enrich the experience?

How often have you heard someone say something like this:

“I wish I had asked Grandma to tell me how she made (*a particular food*). For years, I meant to spend an afternoon with her and learn how she made it. You know, she never followed a recipe. She had the recipe in her head! I wish I had helped her to write down the ingredients and, then, I could have described her preparation as she worked in the kitchen. I wish I had helped her to preserve that recipe—and now it’s lost to us.”

Sound like something you’ve said when a matriarch or patriarch has passed away? Often those forgotten memories center on table traditions—culinary customs surrounding a family meal or perhaps a holiday observance. We’ve heard stories of families in which even the mention of a particular kind of cookie, bread, pickle, sausage, fruit preserve, barbecue, vegetable or soup—just to name a few examples—summons potent memories of loved ones. Think carefully about who holds the secrets behind the favorite table traditions in your family. Why not act now to preserve your favorite customs? This exercise is a great way to start this goal of remembering, recording and sharing these favorite memories.

Beyond the basic group activity, described above in this Discussion Guide, you may find that individuals will be inspired to track down details and true stories behind beloved foods. You can encourage that effort and schedule a future gathering to enjoy the results of these family oral histories.

If you have enough time in a discussion series, you might invite participants to bring in a copy of their original recipe to share—or, even better, you can invite some participants to collaborate on a session in which you actually taste their beloved foods. That’s what Maria Houroian did in helping our National Kidney Foundation of Michigan team prepare pages 53 through 57 of our book. Take a look. She spent time with her nona and we published her recipe and photo.

Responses

This is an exciting invitation, so brace yourself for an enthusiastic response. This activity always summons fond memories of participants’ homes—sometimes all the way back to a family’s original homeland. Often, as they tell their stories, people recall times of challenge, immigration, struggles with poverty, holidays and other milestones—or loved ones who have passed away. We always find some stories to be light hearted, as well. In the process, you’ll occasionally laugh. However, you’re also likely to find a participant shedding a tear as they share a particular story. You’ll find a range of emotions surfacing.

You may find that every person in the room wants time to share. As group leader, try to manage the available time to permit an appropriate number of people to speak. If you’re in a large gathering, where a handful of people will report back to the entire group, consider inviting willing participants to move to the center of the room and sit comfortably while telling a story. Put them at ease. Then, ask other participants to ask questions or to share their own memories that echo as they listen to each story.

The first goal of this activity is to unite the group in shared experiences: Food is a universal concern. But, this activity ultimately demonstrates that any group, no matter how diverse, is united in enjoying at least some foods.

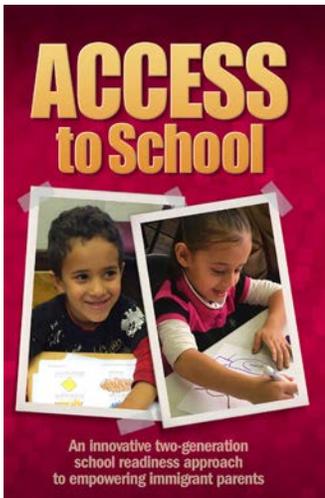
Expand the Conversation

If you've read this book, used this Discussion Guide and care about these issues, then please help with the larger overall effort. Now more than ever, Americans need to be reminded of the challenges we face in early childhood education and nutrition. With funding cuts and shifting public priorities nationwide, assistance from community-based nonprofits will be urgently needed. You can help meet these needs by letting others know about your personal interest—and the potential of group discussions. Many men and women feel isolated in their concern for the welfare of young children. Simply letting other people know of your concern can help to touch off a growing community-wide awareness.

One way you can expand the conversation is by visiting the book's Amazon page and adding a review of the book. Of course, we hope you've found this book helpful, so we welcome Amazon reviews that may prompt others to pick up a copy and extend the discussion.

But that's not all! Share your thoughts on Facebook or in your own newsletters. *(Note: You are free to quote from our book in a blog post or column you might write about your experience in reading and discussing Regie's Rainbow Adventure. We want you to share these important ideas far and wide.)*

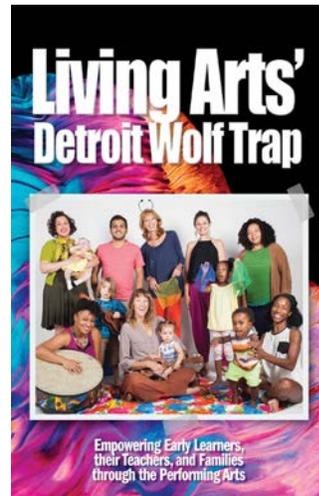
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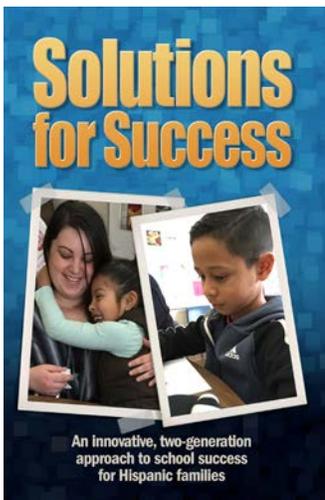
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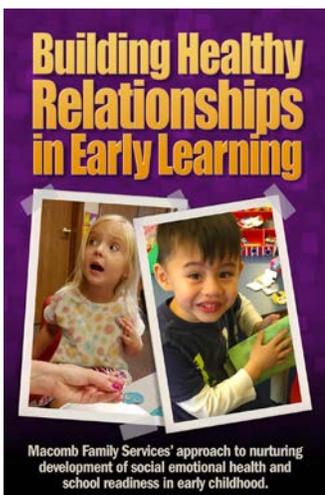
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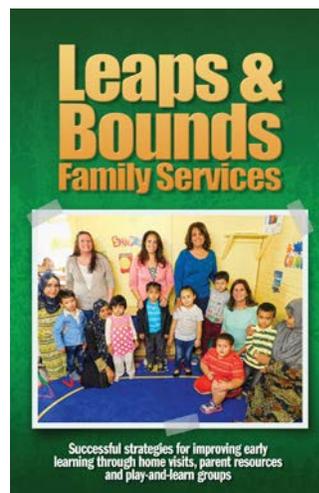
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