



Safe & Effective Mealtime Policy

Policy Name:	Safe & Effective Mealtime Policy
Adopted By:	Louise Farrow-Brookes
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1. Policy Overview

The Company recognises that mealtimes at nursery are integral to a child's development, supporting their personal, social and language skills, as well as promoting confidence and independence.

The Company strives for excellence in food safety by adhering to the following principles:

- The safety of the product will be of the highest standard.
- The quality of the product will be of the highest standard.

2. Responsibilities

2.1 Manager Responsibilities

The Manager must:

- 2.1.1** Ensure all relevant staff have Food Safety & Hygiene Level 2 training before supervising mealtimes or handling food. This training must be renewed every 3 years.
- 2.1.2** Deploy staff to ensure there is always at least one paediatric first aider on duty during every mealtime.
- 2.1.3** Display menus for parents/carers and provide copies on request, discussing ingredients and potential allergies where required.
- 2.1.4** Monitor, or ensure other members of the management team monitor, mealtimes regularly using the Mealtime Observation Sheet (Appendix 1).
- 2.1.5** Ensure that any child who needs a care plan due to a dietary need has one completed and in place before the child stays for their first meal at the nursery. All evidence of the child's condition or allergy must be provided by parents and saved to the child's OneDrive file. If a child is under investigation, parents have 12 weeks to gain this information formally for review.
- 2.1.6** Managers/senior staff must complete an effective mealtime observation each quarter in each age group, then save it to the designated observation folder created by the site.

2.2 Chef/Cook Responsibilities

The chef/cook must:

- 2.2.1** Complete Food Safety & Hygiene Level 3 within 6 months of employment, which must be renewed every 3 years. They must hold at least Food Safety & Hygiene Level 2 before starting employment in the kitchen.
- 2.2.2** Complete other relevant safeguarding and Health & Safety online courses, as per their induction, and ensure this is checked within supervision. Cling film must be removed from food trays/containers before the food trolley enters the room.

- 2.2.3** Adhere to all procedures, paperwork and practices, and follow all guidelines and tasks on the Food Guru app.
- 2.2.4** Plan menus in line with Government guidance and example menu documents. Menus are adapted to any individual child's needs where necessary.
- 2.2.5** Meet with parents/carers to discuss menus, nutrition and special requirements when required.
- 2.2.6** Actively engage with staff and children to promote and advise on healthy eating.
- 2.2.7** Lead and/or support cooking activities with the children.
- 2.2.8** Provide the correct number of crockery and cutlery items for children and staff, ensuring knives are provided for children who are developmentally ready. Knives must be provided for children aged 2 years and over.

2.3 Staff Team Responsibilities

The staff team must:

- 2.3.1** Never leave any child unattended while they are eating.
- 2.3.2** Understand the correct way to cut and chop foods for young children, as detailed on the Choking Hazards Poster (Appendix 2 and Appendix 3). Copies must always be displayed in mealtime seating areas.
- 2.3.3** Know and remain alert for allergens in food, as shown on the Food Standards Agency poster, which must also be displayed in the room's mealtime eating area (Appendix 3).
- 2.3.4** Maintain the highest personal hygiene standards before, during and after mealtimes. Staff must role model hand washing at mealtimes before attending to children at the designated table and must ensure they are visibly washing their hands.
- 2.3.5** Be attentive and supportive throughout mealtimes, deploying themselves effectively to ensure children receive appropriate assistance where needed.
- 2.3.6** Create a social and relaxed atmosphere at mealtimes, engaging in conversations with children and demonstrating a positive attitude to food and healthy eating. When role modelling positive eating with children, staff must sit near or at the table, even on the corner if there is no space at the table, and use the correct crockery and utensils.
- 2.3.7** Follow procedures for preparing and storing formula feeds and breast milk.
- 2.3.8** Ensure babies and young children are seated safely in a highchair or appropriately sized low chair while eating. Where possible, there should be a designated eating space where distractions are minimised. Children must always be within sight and hearing of a member of staff while eating. Choking can be completely silent, so staff must remain alert to signs that a child may be choking. Where possible, staff should sit facing children while they eat to reduce choking risk, prevent food sharing and identify unexpected allergic reactions. When a child experiences a choking incident that

requires intervention, the practitioner must immediately follow the correct first aid procedures, complete an incident form and contact the parents.

- 2.3.9** Hold babies when bottle feeding. Babies must be fed by their Key Person or Buddy Key Person wherever possible.

3. Procedures

3.1 Weaning Babies

Baby weaning is recommended from approximately 6 months old, when additional foods are needed to complement the nutrients from breast or formula milk.

- 3.1.1** The following foods must not be given to children under the age of 6 months:

- Cow's milk, eggs, and food containing wheat or gluten such as bread or pasta.
- Nuts, peanuts and peanut products, seeds, fish and shellfish.

- 3.1.2** The Key Person or Buddy Key Person must work closely with parents/carers when weaning babies to ensure a consistent approach at nursery and home. Staff of young children who are weaning must use the company weaning guideline form, working in partnership with parents (Appendix 6, with Appendix 7 as an example).

- 3.1.3** Babies and young children under 2 must be given opportunity and time to use their hands, grasp finger foods and use spoons as part of their developmental progression.

- 3.1.4** Children under 18 months should have fruit skin removed, while children over 18 months of age can be served fruit with skin on.

3.2 Special Dietary Requirements

- 3.2.1** The Key Person must collect and record information on children's food requirements during registration and settling in. Any special requirements must be shared with the Manager and cook/chef to ensure the child's needs can be met.

- 3.2.2** All paperwork for supporting special dietary requirements must be completed and in place before the child starts. This includes the care plan (see Critical Care Plan Policy) and the child's colour-coded mat, which must show a clear photo, name and details of the special requirement. Placemats that become damaged or faded must be replaced immediately.

- 3.2.3** In the event of a child developing a food allergy after starting nursery, all paperwork and procedures for that child must be updated before the child returns to nursery. All relevant staff must also be made aware of the change in dietary requirements.

- 3.2.4** Any food safety breaches must be reported without delay. A Serious Incident Report (Appendix 5) must be completed, and the Manager must inform the Area Manager as soon as practicably possible, who will support notification to regulatory bodies where applicable.

3.3 General Mealtime Procedures and Practice

- 3.3.1** A balanced and healthy breakfast, midday meal, tea and daily rolling snacks are provided for children attending a full day at the nursery.
- 3.3.2** The chef and practitioners are responsible for ensuring the highest standards of safety and hygiene are maintained at every mealtime.
- 3.3.3** The daily procedure for recording, delivering and checking meals, including special dietary requirements, must be followed with diligence and accuracy. The chef/cook or kitchen assistant must be present when food is handed over from the kitchen to the room. They must only hand over to a permanent staff member from their own site, not cover staff, who has completed Level 2 Food Hygiene and is competent and happy to do so. The individual room dietary form (Appendix 9) must be signed by both parties in witness of each other. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.
- 3.3.4** Food coming from the kitchen must be covered with either cling film or tin foil. Cling film **MUST NOT** enter the nursery rooms. If the kitchen chef has used cling film to cover the food, it **MUST** be removed before the food trolley enters the room. This is the chef's responsibility, and staff must check it has been removed. Tin foil may remain on the food and can be removed by staff and disposed of in the bin.
- 3.3.5** Food coming from the kitchen for **RED** placemat children (allergies) **MUST** be pre-served separately onto plates before leaving the kitchen and covered.
- 3.3.6** **YELLOW** placemat children's food can be served within the whole room's serving dishes if it is food the children are allowed to consume.
- 3.3.7** Staff must recognise mealtimes as an opportunity for children to socialise and develop their personal, emotional, physical and language skills. Children must feel secure and supported, and staff must be attentive, engaged and involved during mealtimes. During meals and snack times, children are encouraged to use their manners and say "please" and "thank you", and conversation is encouraged.
- 3.3.8** Staff and children must wash their hands thoroughly before meals. Children must feel secure and supported, and staff must be attentive, engaged and involved during mealtimes.
- 3.3.9** When children's clothes have been soiled during mealtimes, they must be changed into clean clothes once the mealtime is over.
- 3.3.10** Children must be given opportunities to develop independence by setting tables, pouring drinks and serving their own food wherever possible. However, staff must ensure that any special dietary procedures and arrangements are adhered to as a priority.
- 3.3.11** Children with allergies are not permitted to self-serve because safety is the priority. Their food must be pre-served by the kitchen, with an extra serving on a **RED** plate if the child wishes to have a second portion.

- 3.3.12** **YELLOW** placemat children can self-serve as long as the food on the menu that day is food they can consume. Where the food is not suitable for them, it **MUST** be pre-served by the kitchen, covered and provided with an extra serving on a **YELLOW** plate if the child wishes to have a second portion.
- 3.3.13** Staff must provide appropriately sized utensils, bowls and dishes to enable children to self-serve. Children are encouraged to drink from cups at mealtimes and from their water bottles at all other times, unless a child refuses a cup and will only drink from their bottle.
- 3.3.14** Staff must ensure the food is at a safe temperature before allowing children to self-serve. Staff must not blow on food. The chef completes temperature checks on all food before serving to children and records this on the Food Guru app.
- 3.3.15** A staff member **MUST** be seated next to **RED** placemat children for safety measures and cross-contamination prevention, and must be seated nearby to **YELLOW** placemat children to assist where necessary.
- 3.3.16** If children wish to have a second portion, they **MUST** be supported by staff, with staff assisting in uncovering food and continuing supervision.
- 3.3.17** Placemats must not be placed on the floor. Children must be given the opportunity to find their own mat and sit where they choose when possible, or in their key group. Special dietary arrangements must always be adhered to as a priority.
- 3.3.18** Children must not be expected to sit for prolonged periods before food arrives. Once a child has their own food in front of them, they can start to eat and must not be made to wait.
- 3.3.19** Children will be encouraged to eat their meals but must never be forced to eat. Food must never be withheld from a child as a punishment or bribe.
- 3.3.20** Fledgelings Day Nurseries is a provider of Halal food only.
- 3.3.21** Menus include at least two servings of fresh fruit and vegetables per day.
- 3.3.22** Only milk and water are provided as drinks to promote oral health. Fresh drinking water is always available and accessible. It is frequently offered to children and babies and intake is monitored. In hot weather, staff will encourage children to drink more water to keep them hydrated.
- 3.3.23** Parents' cultural or religious preferences will be supported using **YELLOW** placemats. Any special dietary requirement or food allergy (**RED** placemat) will be detailed via a care plan and supported by medical documents or medical review by a doctor or paediatrician. This will be reviewed every 12 weeks. The individual child will be supported with a **RED** placemat.
- 3.3.24** All other children who have no dietary requirements or religious preferences will have **GREEN** placemats. Staff should assist children to place these on the back of their chairs. Yellow and red placemats stay on the table or highchair tray in front of the child for the full duration of mealtime. At each mealtime, staff should check and follow this procedure.
- 3.3.25** Placemats that become damaged or faded must be replaced immediately.

- 3.3.26** Staff must give careful consideration to seating to avoid cross-contamination of food from child to child. Where appropriate, an adult will sit with children during meals to ensure safety and minimise risks. Age/stage appropriate discussions will also take place with children about allergies and potential risks to make them aware of the dangers of sharing certain foods.
- 3.3.27** Staff show sensitivity in providing for children's diets and allergies. They do not use a child's diet or allergy as a label for the child, or make a child feel singled out because of their diet or allergy.
- 3.3.28** Cultural differences in eating habits are respected, for example eating with hands or baby-led weaning. While this is supported, cutlery is also promoted so children can develop this skill and their fine motor skills.
- 3.3.29** Any child who shows signs of distress during mealtimes or struggles to try foods on offer will be supported sensitively by staff.
- 3.3.30** Children who refuse to eat at mealtimes are offered food later in the day.
- 3.3.31** Children are given time to eat at their own pace and are not rushed. If a child is still eating and their peers have finished, staff should consider moving the child to a table where children are still eating to ensure they are safe and staff can deploy effectively.
- 3.3.32** Quantities offered take account of the ages of the children being catered for, in line with recommended portion sizes for babies and young children.
- 3.3.33** Positive attitudes to healthy eating are promoted through play opportunities and discussions.
- 3.3.34** The nursery provides parents with daily updates of feeding routines for all children via Family. Staff should not be engaging with their iPads at mealtime if supervising a table.
- 3.3.35** No child is ever left alone when eating or drinking, to minimise the risk of choking.
- 3.3.36** Special festive/cultural occasions, including birthdays, may be celebrated with the occasional treat of foods such as cakes and biscuits.
- 3.3.37** Parents are allowed to bring in cake for birthdays. These will only be accepted with a full list of ingredients, including allergens. The practitioner receiving the cake at handover will check for the full ingredient/allergen list and take a picture to upload onto Family for parents/carers to view. It is the parents' responsibility to read this. Any cakes without a full ingredient/allergen list will not be permitted to remain on nursery premises. These will not be eaten on site and will be handed to parents at pick-up or collection time.
- 3.3.38** General foods that will be avoided at Fledgelings Day Nurseries include popcorn, marshmallows, grapes, cherries, soft cheeses such as brie and camembert, sugary drinks, honey for under 2s, strawberries, raspberries and kiwi fruit. Nuts are NOT permitted on site.
- 3.3.39** If children are to be involved with any of the foods mentioned above, for example during a cooking session, permission must be gained from parents beforehand.

4. Additional Supporting Information

Staff must also follow and refer to the following supporting training, systems and guidance:

- Food Safety
- Food Guru App
- HACCP Level 2
- Food Allergy Awareness
- Infection Prevention and Control
- Government Guidance and Example Menus: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-nutrition>

5. Appendices

Appendix	Description
1	Effective Mealtime Observation
2	Early Years Choking Poster
3	Early Years Choking Table
4	14 Allergen Poster
5	Serious Incident Report - Word Version
6	Blank Weaning Child Form
7	Example Weaning Form
8	Care Plan
9	Dietary Sign Off Room Weekly Sheet

6. Review History

Date Approved	Reviewed By
03/01/2023	Louise Farrow-Brookes
23/05/2023	Louise Farrow-Brookes
12/12/2023	Salma Khodabaksh
06/06/2025	Louise Farrow-Brookes