MEALTIMES

Guidance

We encourage children to be involved in the preparation of mealtimes as much as possible and staff will support and encourage children to serve themselves. Children should have the opportunity to make choices and be independent at mealtimes. Mealtimes should be a happy, social occasion for staff and children alike, promoting 'family style' dining. Positive interactions should be shared at these times and enjoyed, and staff should act as positive role models.

Staff will follow this in line with the Nutrition and Mealtimes Policy

Breakfast

- This should be offered as a rolling breakfast in children's rooms, where children can access breakfast at a table if they wish. Children should be able to serve their own breakfast and pour their own drink, with adult support where necessary.
- Placemats are used throughout mealtimes to state which children are on different diets
- Children can be asked to join an activity if the breakfast table is full and then come to the table when there is a space.
- Staff can engage in conversation about the day's plans, the journey to school or general conversation with their friends.
- Water and milk should be on offer to drink, and children should be supported to pour their own drinks where they can.

Snack

- For children over 2 a 'snack bar' can be set up and a rolling snack offered, (like breakfast), children can access this when they wish to, this enables children who are engaged in play to continue uninterrupted.
- Placemats are used throughout mealtimes to state which children are on different diets
- Staff should inform children when the 'snack bar' opens and give them notice of when the 'snack bar is closing' this enables them to decide when they want to break from play
- Staff could operate an interactive waiting list to support children to understand when they will be next if there is not a space at the table.
- Water and milk should be on offer to drink, and children should be supported to pour their own drinks where they can.

Lunch/Teatime

- Staff should engage children in setting up for lunch and teatime, setting tables, identifying placemats, counting cutlery and crockery.
- Placemats are used throughout mealtimes to state which children are on different diets
- We encourage staff to eat a little of the meal with the children and act as a positive role model.
- Where possible children should be encouraged and supported to self-serve.
- Staff should engage and support children to self-scrape their plates after their meal (a scrape station can be set up) and assist in wiping tables and placemats, this supports their independence.
- Staff will sit with the children and engage in reflection about the day's events and join in with the children's conversations.

- Water should be on offer to drink and children should be supported to pour their own drinks where they can.

Special Diets

- We have positive discussion with parents/carers and children when dietary requirements exist
- Risk assessments are in place for when a child has special requirements
- There are measures in place to ensure a child with an allergy cannot come into contact with food other children are eating to which he/she may be allergic
- A RED plate system is in place to identify high risk allergies and safeguard children
- Placemats are used throughout mealtimes to state which children are on different diets
- All staff need to be aware of which children have a food allergy and the action to be taken if needed (see Red Plate Diet (Allergy, Intolerance) or Dietary Requirements (Non-Allergy) form, Food Allergy & Nutrition Management policy)
- Food allergy is not something that children grow out of, but the reaction may become less severe as they grow older

Staff should be seated with the children at ALL mealtimes and should NOT leave a child unattended whilst eating.

Learning about and through food

Mealtimes are a real learning opportunity and learning about food can easily be incorporated into all areas of learning - For example:

1. **Personal, social and emotional development** - Meal times offer children experiences to taste different foods, overcome dislikes and learn how to share. Cooking activities offer opportunities for learning through working with others and increasing self-esteem.
2. **Physical development**. Fine and gross motor skills can be developed through activities such as using knives and forks, preparing food, scraping plates and washing up. Mealtimes can be used to help children to make healthy food choices.
3. **Literacy**. Many stories involve food. Use these to teach about ingredients, where food comes from and about food for special occasions and from different cultures. Language can be developed and senses explored through discussing and describing the taste, texture, size, look and smell of food.
4. **Mathematics**. Activities such as counting out spoons and pieces of fruit when setting the table or at snack time can be used to support numeracy skills. Sorting and matching foods into different types can help promote organisational skills and reasoning.
5. **Communication and language**. Sitting around a table eating food together is a good way to extend language, teach conversation, and social skills
6. **Understanding the world**. Food tasting activities teach children about ingredients, the seasons and where food comes from including food from different cultures – growing fruit and vegetables teaches children about where food comes from, about life cycles, about gardening and how to look after plants. It is also a good form of physical activity. If there is limited growing space, many vegetables and herbs can be grown on windowsills and in pots or bags.
7. **Expressive arts and design**. Art activities can engage children with food and alert them to colours and shapes.

Associated Documents

- Nutrition and Mealtimes policy

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- Food Allergens guidance
- Food Safety Management guidance
- Food Allergy & Nutrition Management policy
- Red Plate Diet (Allergy, Intolerance) form
- Dietary Requirements (Non-Allergy) form
- Blank Risk Assessment