

Food & Drink Procedure

Mealtimes are important to children's development. The food they eat at mealtime gives the vitamins, minerals, and protein they need to grow and stay healthy. It gives them energy and makes them feel good. Eating habits and attitudes learned in childhood can last a lifetime.

We aim to make eating enjoyable and to create a complete dining experience that appeals to the children and encourages them to appreciate the food. Children are encouraged to make a positive contribution by helping to lay the table with placemats, plates, cups, and cutlery. Children can also contribute by creating their own centrepieces or laying the table with flowers.

Our mealtime routines are designed to encourage children's self help, independence and choice. Equipment used must be appropriate to the age and stage of development and designed to promote children's independence.

The opportunity for personal, social and emotional skills to be developed and the opportunities to provide dialogue to support language and communication skills is very valuable. There should be no distinction between children who have hot dinners and those who bring packed lunches.

Under two-year-olds

Babies should be seated in feeding chairs or around a table in a sociable arrangement and prepared with bibs. Hands should be cleaned with a flannel or bowl of soapy water.

Breakfast

Babies under six months should be offered baby rice made with hot water if they have started weaning. Babies older than six months can be offered cereal with cow's milk or if parents prefer, they can provide formula milk for their cereal. Be mindful that children are just arriving and settling in so the pace should be calm and friendly. **A drink of water should always be offered with the breakfast meal.**

Morning snack

The snack should be available in a serving platter, which each child having their own plate and drinking cup. Children can be encouraged to point to food choices although we should aim to ensure they try the foods available. **Only milk or water should be on offer as a drink – see dairy schedule below.**

The social arrangement of children must be supported with positive language and positive facial expressions, with the practitioners modelling good table manners.

Lunch & Afternoon Tea

It is acceptable for food to be plated for the under twos with the provision of enough cutlery for the staff to feed the children as well as the child to practise self feeding skills. The staff need to ensure they are using lots of encouragement to help children eat. Juice or squash should not be offered to children under one, unless it is specifically provided by the parents. **A drink of water should always be offered with the lunch time meal. At tea time milk or water should be on offer as a drink – see dairy intake below.**

The social arrangement of children must be supported with positive language and positive facial expressions, with the practitioners modelling good table manners. This is an opportunity to use lots of language about food, how it smells, what it tastes like, how it looks, different textures and colours and why it's good for us.

Two to three-year-olds

Breakfast

The breakfast tray should be ready with all your requirements – cereal, milk, bowls, spoons, cup and water. Children should be seated around a table in a sociable arrangement. Be mindful that children are just arriving and settling in so the pace should be calm and friendly. Lots of encouragement and praise should be given for children eating. **A drink of water should always be offered with the breakfast meal.**

Morning snack

Children should be taken in small groups to wash their hands. Children should be seated around a table in a sociable arrangement.

The snack should be available in a serving platter, which each child having their own plate and drinking cup. Children should be encouraged to help themselves to a sufficient serving of the snack on offer we should aim to ensure they try the foods available. **Only milk or water should be on offer as a drink.**

The social arrangement of children must be supported with positive language and positive facial expressions, with the practitioners modelling good table manners. It is not essential for children to be able to say “please and thank you” although this should be encouraged. Food cannot be withheld for not saying it and children should not be shamed for not saying the words. The emphasis should be on enjoyment of food, talking about the activities of the morning and finding opportunities to praise children for behaviour displayed.

Children should be encouraged to be patient and wait for others to finish snack before leaving the table. Where this is not possible for the range of children, table manners are once again modelled to say excuse me.

Lunch & Afternoon Tea

A quiet time should precede the start of lunch such as circle time or reading. Children should be taken in small groups to wash their hands. Children should be seated around a table in a sociable arrangement. Staff can model how we lay the table, whilst children are encouraged to participate. Every child should have a plate, appropriate cutlery and a cup.

The food must not be plated and should be available in serving bowls. Children should be encouraged to help try the foods available, there should be lots of praise and encouragement for children whilst eating. **Only water should be on offer as a drink.**

The social arrangement of children must be supported with positive language and positive facial expressions, with the practitioners modelling good table manners. It is not essential for children to be able to say "please and thank you" although this should be encouraged. Food cannot be withheld for not saying it and children should not be shamed for not saying the words. This is an opportunity to use lots of language about food, how it smells, what it tastes like, how it looks, different textures and colours. We can discuss healthy eating, which good foods make us strong, again the emphasis is on enjoyment.

Three to five-year-olds

Breakfast

The breakfast tray should be ready with all your requirements – cereal, milk, bowls, spoons, cup and water. Children should be seated around a table in a sociable arrangement and prepared. Be mindful that children are just arriving and settling in so the pace should be calm and friendly. Children should be encouraged to choose their breakfast cereal and given support to pour their milk until they are competent to do it on their own. Lots of encouragement and praise should be given for children eating. **A drink of water should always be offered with the breakfast meal.**

Morning snack

The provision of morning snack should be on a self access basis, such as a cafe.

The snack should be available in a serving platter on a table with sufficient plates and cups for each child. Another table should be identified as the snack table should be prepared with no more than 4 chairs for children to sit and eat. The aim is for children to help themselves to the snack, pour themselves a drink of milk or water and then sit down with a group of friends to enjoy. Once they have finished eating, they need to be responsible and take their plates and cups to a washing up bowl. The child must also be responsible to take down their picture from the snack board to indicate they have had snack. **Only milk or water should be on offer as a drink.**

A visual aid should help children remember each step in this complex process. Positive reminders from staff should prompt children when the routine is not going according to plan.

Lunch & Afternoon Tea

A quiet time should precede the start of lunch such as circle time or reading. Children should go in small groups to wash their hands. Children should participate in laying the table with plates, cutlery, and cups. Every child should have a plate, appropriate cutlery and a cup.

The food must not be plated and should be available in serving bowls. Children of this age should not be lining up (canteen style) for food service. Children must be seated at the table and be assisted where necessary to serve themselves food. Children should be encouraged to help try the foods available, there should be lots of praise and encouragement for children whilst eating. **Only water should be on offer as a drink.**

The social arrangement of children must be supported with positive language and positive facial expressions, with the practitioners modelling good table manners. Children should be encouraged to say "please and thank you. Food cannot be withheld for not saying it and children should not be shamed for not saying the words. This is a valuable opportunity to discuss healthy eating choices, food eaten in different cultures, where food comes from or is grown. It is also an opportunity to discuss children's enjoyment of the morning activities.

Children should be encouraged to be patient and wait for others to finish lunch before leaving the table. Where this is not possible for the range of children, table manners are once again modelled to say excuse me.

Dairy Schedule

Babies

Breast milk is the best drink for babies for the first year and beyond. The only alternative to breast milk in the first six months is infant formula. Babies should continue to drink breast milk or infant formula until at least a year old.

Ordinary milk isn't suitable as a drink until a baby is a year old. This is because it doesn't contain the right balance of nutrients to meet your baby's needs. Ordinary full-fat milks (from cows, goats or sheep) can be used for cooking in foods such as cheese sauce and custard from six months.

At about a year old, a switch can be made from formula to full-fat milk as a drink.

Children

Children should drink full-fat milk until they are at least two years old because they may not get as many calories as they need from semi-skimmed milk.

After the age of two, children can gradually move to semi-skimmed milk as a main drink, as long as they are eating a varied and balanced diet and growing well.

Don't give skimmed or 1% fat milk to children as a main drink until they're at least five years old because they don't contain enough vitamin A and skimmed milk doesn't contain enough calories.

Review of Procedure

This procedure is reviewed annually.

Review date – December 2025