

# Meal and Snack Time Policy



## Policy Statement

Mealtimes at Sandcastle Nursery & Preschool Ltd are viewed as a valuable opportunity for children to develop positive relationships with food, build independence, and enjoy a calm social experience. This policy sets out our commitment to promoting healthy eating, respecting individual dietary needs, and ensuring mealtimes are consistent, inclusive, and enjoyable for every child.

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## Our Ethos

- We provide **fresh, nutritious meals and snacks** daily, including a variety of fruits and vegetables to help meet children's five-a-day.
  - We **respect and follow all dietary needs**, including allergies, cultural and religious preferences, and parental requests.
  - We promote a **calm and positive eating environment**, where children are encouraged—but never forced—to try new foods.
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## Procedures and Responsibilities

### Dietary Needs and Allergies

- Parents' dietary preferences and instructions for their child will be followed.
- Allergy and dietary requirement lists are clearly displayed in every room and are referred to at all relevant times.
- We do not allow food substitutes brought from home unless due to specific dietary needs discussed with management.

### Food Preparation and Hygiene

- All staff involved in food handling are required to have a valid **Food Hygiene Certificate**.
- Staff must wear **appropriate protective clothing** when preparing and serving food.
- The nursery aims to maintain a **Food Standards Agency hygiene rating of 5/5**. Compliance is monitored by management.

### Health and Safety

- A qualified **First Aider** is always present during meal and snack times.
  - Children always have access to **fresh drinking water**, with **milk** offered at snack times.
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## Mealtime Practice

### Structure and Timing

- Meals are given at regular intervals and at consistent times each day.
- Children are given at least **30 minutes for lunch/dinner** (approximately 20 minutes for the main meal and 10 for dessert), ensuring they are not rushed.

- Staff remain with children until the **last child has finished eating**, where practical, to promote social skills and prevent unnecessary pressure to finish quickly.

### Encouragement and Independence

- Children are encouraged to try new foods using **positive reinforcement**, role modelling, and sticker rewards when appropriate.
- **Children are never forced to eat**, nor is pudding withheld as a reward or incentive.
- If a child does not eat their meal, it will be recorded, and they will still be offered dessert as part of their meal.
- We do not provide alternative meals, but staff ensure the child has another opportunity to eat at the next mealtime or snack.

### Table Manners and Exploration

- Staff model good table manners by **eating alongside children**, using age-appropriate portions only if enough food is available and without affecting children's portions.
- Children are encouraged to **explore their food**, especially in the early years, as this supports sensory development and early mark-making.
- Children use **real cutlery** appropriate for their age and stage, starting from the baby room onwards.

### Managing Concerns

- If there are concerns about a child's eating habits or nutrition, staff will speak with parents/carers and involve the **Nursery Manager** where appropriate.

### Behaviour at Mealtimes

- Children exploring food with their hands or cutlery will be supported unless the behaviour becomes disruptive.
- Children are taught to wait patiently, share food respectfully, and help with tidying where developmentally appropriate.

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### Ongoing Commitment

All staff are expected to uphold this policy and work in partnership with families to promote children's health and well-being. The management team will continue to monitor food safety, nutrition, and mealtime practices to ensure we remain a high-quality setting committed to best practice.