

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.