

Community Pre-schools Safe Eating Policy

This Safe Eating Policy outlines the principles, guidelines, and practices designed to create a safe and supportive environment during meal and snack times. It aims to protect children from risks such as choking, allergic reactions, and foodborne illness, while also fostering positive eating habits and social skills.

Policy Objectives

- To provide a safe and inclusive eating environment for all children.
- To minimise the risk of choking and allergic reactions during meal and snack times.
- To promote healthy eating practices and good hygiene.
- To comply with local health regulations and national best-practice guidelines.
- To support families in providing suitable and safe food options for their children.
- To encourage positive social interactions and independence during eating.

This policy applies to all children, staff, volunteers, and visitors within the Community Pre-school settings, including during excursions and special events where food is consumed.

Safe Eating Environment

Supervision

Active supervision is essential. Staff must be present and attentive whenever children are eating or drinking. This includes:

- Sitting with the children during meal and snack times to model healthy eating behaviours and monitor children closely.
- Observing children for signs of difficulty with eating, such as choking, coughing, or gagging.
- Ensuring that there is always an appropriate staff-to-child ratio.

Seating Arrangements

Children must be seated while eating and drinking. The following guidelines apply:

- Children should not walk, run, or play while eating.
- Meals and snacks should be served at tables or designated eating areas.
- Seating should be age-appropriate and stable, allowing children to sit upright comfortably.

Food Safety

Hygiene and Food Handling

Maintaining high standards of hygiene is crucial for preventing foodborne illnesses.

Procedures include:

- Ensuring all staff wash their hands with soap and water before handling food and after assisting children with eating.
- Encouraging children to wash their hands before and after meals.
- Cleaning and sanitising tables, chairs, and eating utensils before and after use.
- Using gloves or utensils when serving food.
- Storing food at safe temperatures and ensuring perishable items are refrigerated promptly.
- Discarding expired or spoiled foods immediately.

Food Preparation

- Foods must be cut into small, manageable pieces appropriate for the age and ability of the children.
- Hard foods (e.g., carrots, apples) should be grated or cooked to soften them for younger children.
- Foods known to pose a choking risk (e.g., whole nuts, popcorn, hard lollies, whole grapes) should not be served to children under five.
- Bones should be removed from meats and fish.

Food Allergies and Special Dietary Requirements

Identification and Management

- All children with known allergies or dietary restrictions must be identified upon enrolment, with up-to-date information maintained at all times.
- Individual Health Care Plans and Allergy Action Plans must be developed, communicated, and reviewed regularly for each child with specific needs.
- Clear and visible signage should be used in the eating area to indicate children with allergies or special dietary requirements.
- Staff should receive regular training in anaphylaxis recognition and emergency response, including the use of auto-injectors.
- Parents and caregivers must provide safe, clearly labelled food for children with allergies or medical diets.
- All staff must know emergency procedures and the location of medication and first aid kits.

Minimising Cross-Contamination

- Surfaces, utensils, and equipment used in the preparation of allergen-free foods must be thoroughly cleaned before use.
- Separate storage areas should be used for allergen-free and standard food items wherever possible.
- Handwashing should be enforced after handling allergenic foods.

Healthy Eating Guidelines

Nutrition Standards

Community Pre-schools is committed to promoting healthy eating habits. The following guidelines are recommended:

- Encourage a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and dairy foods.
- Discourage highly processed foods, foods high in sugar, salt, and saturated fats, and sugary beverages.
- Milk and water is the preferred drink, and should be readily available at all times.
- Food and drink should never be used as a punishment or reward.
- Encourage children to try new foods in a supportive, pressure-free environment.

Family Engagement

- Families should be informed of the pre-school's healthy eating guidelines and supported with resources and advice.
- Information sessions and communications about healthy lunchbox ideas and safe food options may be provided.
- Collaboration with families is essential for supporting children with allergies or dietary restrictions.

Promoting Safe Eating Practices

Supporting Children's Independence

- Children should be encouraged to feed themselves and develop self-help skills, such as opening containers and using cutlery.
- Staff should offer guidance and assistance as appropriate to the child's ability and developmental stage.

Encouraging Positive Social Interactions

- Meals and snacks provide opportunities for social learning, conversation, and the development of table manners.
- Staff are encouraged to sit and eat with children, modelling positive attitudes towards food and social interaction.

Recognising and Responding to Eating Difficulties

- Staff must be aware of children who may have eating difficulties, including sensory sensitivities, aversions, or medical conditions.
- Concerns about a child's eating behaviour should be communicated with families and, if appropriate, health professionals.

Emergency Procedures

Choking

- All staff must be trained in first aid, including how to recognise and respond to choking.
- In the event of a choking incident, staff must act immediately, following the pre-school's emergency protocols.
- Emergency services should be called if the child cannot dislodge the obstruction and is in distress.
- All choking incidents must be reported and reviewed to improve future safety.

Allergic Reactions

- Staff must be able to identify signs of anaphylaxis and know how to respond rapidly.
- Anaphylaxis management plans must be followed precisely, and emergency medication administered if required.
- Emergency contacts (parents/caregivers) and local medical services must be notified immediately following an incident.

Staff Training and Responsibilities

- Regular training in first aid, allergy awareness, safe food handling, and emergency response is mandatory for all staff.
- Staff are expected to stay updated with current guidelines and participate in ongoing professional development related to child nutrition and safety.
- All incidents and concerns regarding eating safety must be documented and communicated to the appropriate parties.

Communication and Record Keeping

- Accurate records of children's allergies, dietary requirements, emergency action plans, and incidents must be maintained.
- All relevant information must be shared with staff, relief personnel, and volunteers as needed—while respecting privacy.