

09 Early Years Practice Procedures

09.07- Baby and toddler mealtimes

Our Approach

Mealtimes are much more than eating. They are special moments for closeness, comfort, communication and learning. We use these times to help children feel secure, build relationships, and explore food in a positive, relaxed way. We understand the importance of a healthy balanced diet for young children.

A named member of staff is responsible at every meal and snack time for ensuring food meets each child's individual dietary needs and requirements. This is always a qualified member of staff.

Students/unqualified staff

Can supervise meals alongside qualified members of staff and can help prepare food, however only a qualified member of staff must serve at mealtimes.

Bottle-Fed Babies

Feeding babies is a calm, unhurried and responsive experience.


Before Feeding

- Babies' hands are washed before their bottle
- Bottles are warmed or cooled and ready in time.
- Babies are never left hungry or crying while bottles are prepared

During Feeding

- Wherever possible, babies are fed by their key person, or secondary key person if they are not present
- The key person sits comfortably in a chair or on cushions and remains relaxed and calm
- Babies are:
 - Held close
 - Supported to make eye contact
 - Spoken to softly

- Responded to through gestures and communication
- Comforted through touch such as stroking or holding hands

 Feeding is a time for connection and communication, not just nourishment.

After Feeding

- Babies are winded
- Babies are settled for sleep or play, depending on their needs

Other key children may stay nearby during feeding, which can help reduce anxiety or feelings of jealousy, particularly for toddlers.

Planning Feeding Times

- Feeding times are carefully planned to allow one-to-one attention
- If overlap is unavoidable:
 - Arrangements are made so the key person can comfortably support both babies
- Feeding is not treated as a shared task
- Babies are not fed by unfamiliar carers simply to “get it done”
- Babies may hold their own bottle, but are never left propped with a bottle

Toddler Mealtimes

Mealtimes for toddlers are social, calm, and full of learning.

Where & With Whom

- Older babies and toddlers who self-feed usually eat:
 - In their own room
 - With their key group
 - Supported by their key person or other familiar adult in the room

Safety First

- At least one staff member with Paediatric First Aid is always present
- At Peekaboo Childcare, all qualified staff hold Paediatric First Aid
- A staff member is always:
 - In sight and hearing of children
 - Sitting facing children where possible
- This ensures:
 - Safe eating

- Choking risks are minimised
- Food sharing is prevented
- Any allergic reactions are noticed immediately

Hygiene & Role Modelling

- Staff eating with children:
 - Model good hygiene
 - Demonstrate healthy eating habits
 - Follow best practice (e.g. no fizzy drinks)
- Food is delivered safely to rooms in serving dishes on trays
- Tables are prepared before toddlers sit down
- There is no waiting time
- Babies' and toddlers' hands are washed or wiped clean before meals

Learning to Eat

- Children are not discouraged from eating with their fingers
- Touching and exploring food is part of learning to self-feed
- When finished, children may continue to explore remaining food
- Getting messy is normal and acceptable
- Children and tables are cleaned afterwards

Taking Their Time

- Children eat at their own pace
- They are never rushed to fit adult routines
- Mealtimes are:
 - Relaxed
 - Social
 - Enjoyable
 - Sensory learning experiences
 - Important for skill development and emotional satisfaction

Allergies & Dietary Needs

- To protect children with allergies or specific diets:
 - Food sharing and swapping is discouraged
- Staff remain vigilant throughout the meal and where possible an adult will be sat next to children with allergies.
- For children with allergies or specific diets - food is served before or after the rest of the meals.

Mixed-Age Opportunities

- While toddlers usually eat in their rooms:
 - Older children may be invited to join (e.g. siblings)
 - Children who have recently moved rooms may join
- Babies and toddlers may sometimes eat with older children:
 - Only if they are comfortable
 - Never if it causes distress

Working With Parents

We support families by sharing:

- Healthy meal and recipe ideas
- Tooth-brushing tips
- Termly menus
- A rolling 3-week menu for lunch
- Parents can select their child's lunch option each half term

In Summary

Mealtimes at Peekaboo Childcare are about:

- ✓ Safety
- ✓ Nutrition
- ✓ Emotional security
- ✓ Learning and independence
- ✓ Enjoyment