

## 1.9 Prime times – Baby and toddler mealtimes

Feeding and mealtimes are key times in the day for being close and to promote security, as well as for exploration and learning. We understand the importance of a healthy balanced diet for young children.

### Bottle-fed babies

- We asked parents to provide enough supply of breastmilk or formula milk to meet the child's individual needs. These will be stored according to the storage guidelines.
- We ask parents to provide one-two milk bottles to remain at nursery and be labelled with the child's name.
- All staff is trained on how to prepare formula milk.
- All staff is trained on each child's individual needs of milk – how often the child should have milk and what amounts of milk.
- Bottles are warmed and ready in time; babies should not be left hungry and crying while bottles are being prepared.
- The key person sits in a comfortable chair, or on cushions to feed the baby; the key person needs to be relaxed and calm.
- Babies should be held close so that eye contact can be made. Key persons are responsive to their communication gestures during feeding, talking quietly to them, stroking or holding their hands.
- Babies are winded after feeding and the baby is settled to sleep or play.
- Other key children may want to be close to their carer when a baby is being fed. This may allay any anxiety or feelings of jealousy.
- Planning for feeding times should be done to try to avoid overlap so that one-to-one attention can be given. If this cannot be avoided the feeding times should be arranged so that the key person can comfortably be with both babies at the same time. Unless in extreme circumstances, feeding should not be regarded as a shared task; unfamiliar carers should not take over feeding times just to 'get it done'.
- Babies who are old enough to hold their own bottles will be encouraged to do so, but will be supervised by a member of staff.

### Older babies and toddler mealtimes

- For the most part, older babies and toddlers who are feeding themselves have their meals in their rooms.
- Staff who are eating with the children must role-model hygiene, healthy eating and best practice at all times, for example not drinking cans of fizzy drinks in front of the children.
- Food is brought to their room in serving dishes on a trolley.
- Babies' and toddlers' hands are washed before their meals.
- Babies' food is dished into plates by the educators and toddlers are encouraged to dish the food into their plates by themselves whilst supervised by an adult.
- Babies are encouraged to eat with their utensils, but they are not discouraged from eating with their fingers; this exploration of their food with their hands is the beginning of self-feeding. When they have finished, they may wish to 'play' further with any remaining food. It is fine for them to get a bit messy; they, and their table can be cleaned afterwards.
- Young babies and those who are not yet able to feed themselves will be fed by their key person where possible. If the key person is not available, they will be fed by the backup key person.
- Toddlers are encouraged to use their utensils to feed themselves but will never be forced to do so.
- Babies and toddlers are given time to eat at their own pace and are not hurried to fit in with adults' tasks and breaks.

- Mealtimes are relaxed opportunities for social interaction of babies and toddlers with their group and the adults who care for them. It is a time of sensory learning and learning skills, as well as for the fundamental satisfaction of being fed.
- In order to protect children with food allergies or specific dietary requirements, each child has their own eating mat with a photo and the allergy/dietary requirement they have.
- Children are discouraged from sharing and swapping their food with one another and to prevent this from happening we have separate tables for children with food allergies or dietary requirements.
- While toddlers are mainly fed in their rooms, opportunities should be open for older children to be invited into their room for lunch, especially siblings, or children who have just moved up into the older group. There should also be opportunities for babies and toddlers to join the older children for, providing they do not find this unsettling or distressing.