09 Early years practice procedures

09.7 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. Eldene Pre-School and Toddlers understands the importance of a healthy balanced diet for young children. At each meal/snack time, a named person is responsible for checking that the food provided meets all requirements for each child.

Bottle fed babies

- Babies' hands are washed prior to being given their bottle.
- Babies are fed by their key person or back-up key person if they are not in.
- 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, nappies are changed, 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, especially for toddlers.
- 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 will want to hold their own bottles, but they are never left propped up with a bottle to feed themselves.

Toddler mealtimes

- For the most part, older babies and toddlers who are feeding themselves have their meals in their space, with their key group and key person.

- Whilst eating, there should always be a member of staff in the room with a valid Paediatric First Aid certificate.
- **A member of staff should always be in sight and hearing of children when eating and sat facing them wherever possible so they can ensure that children are eating in a way to prevent choking and so they can prevent food sharing and beware of any unexpected allergic reactions.**
- 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.
- Staff arrange the table before toddlers sit down; there should be no waiting time.
- Babies' and toddlers' hands are wiped/washed clean before their meal.
- Key persons serve their children; they ask their children what they want; they do not put food on plates if the toddler indicates that they do not want it. Toddlers can get very upset if their detested food is put in front of them; they do not understand 'try a little bit' in the way an older child does.
- Babies and toddlers 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.
- 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.
- To protect children with food allergies or specific dietary requirements, children are discouraged from sharing and swopping their food with one another.
- 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.
- Information for parents is displayed on the parent's notice board, including:
    - Ten Steps for Healthy Toddlers https://infantandtoddlerforum.org/media/upload/pdf-downloads/HR_toddler_booklet_green.pdf
    - Daily menus including identification of any foods containing allergens

This policy was adopted at a meeting with Eldene Pre-School and Toddlers Committee and Management Held on 10th October 2025. Annual review is due October 2026.

Signed on behalf of Eldene Pre-School and Toddlers.

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