

# MEALTIME

# CHECKLIST

1

It's important to create an appealing dining environment in your setting as this helps to encourage and support children at mealtimes

2

Set up your dining area to ensure that children and staff have enough space to sit and eat comfortably. This includes using chairs and tables suitable for the age and size of the children

3



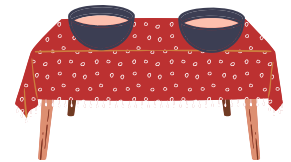
Ensure that the eating equipment you provide is child-friendly. For example, plastic bowls and plates, and plastic/rubber spoons, knives and forks

4

If your dining area is in the same room that children learn and play in, it's important to try and create a dining atmosphere

For example, tablecloths and placemats can make it look more appealing

Ensure there aren't any overly stimulating resources nearby that could distract children



Have set meal and snack times to help children get into a routine

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- ✓ Three meals (breakfast, lunch & tea) and two snacks, morning & afternoon
- ✓ Offer pudding with both lunch and tea time meals
- ✓ Ensure water is available at all meal and snack times (and across the day)
- ✓ Leave no more than a three hour gap between meals and snacks, but avoid offering them too close together
- ✓ Plan mealtimes to last around 30 minutes, allowing time to eat without feeling rushed



6

Involve children in the set-up of mealtimes. For example, they can help to clean the tables, put out the placemats and lay out the cutlery and cups

Ensure you have everything you need before children sit down to eat. Mealtimes can become disjointed and children can become distracted by staff getting up from the table to get bowls, jugs, food, etc



8

Encourage children to serve themselves at mealtimes, even if it's just one or two elements of the meal, such as the vegetables. Put serving bowls and water jugs on the table for children to help themselves to, and offer support as needed



9

Staff can sit and eat with children

It's a good opportunity for positive role modelling, and engaging them in conversation

Keep discussions about food positive & neutral. Avoid describing foods as "good" / "bad" or "healthy" / "unhealthy". Categorising food can create feelings of guilt, shame and fear towards certain foods

# Managing Mealtimes



Use the checklist below to consider suitable options for your setting

## Mealtime Set Up & Serving

- Appropriately sized plates, bowls, cups (open & free-flow), cutlery, bibs
- Welcoming tables, e.g. tablecloth, placemat, napkins, flowers
- Plates and cutlery can be pre-set or set up for self-service for children to take themselves:
  - Knives, forks, spoons in cups on each table
  - Plates, bowls, cups stacked on each table
- Encourage children to take turns to:
  - Set-up- laying the table, handing out cutlery, cups, plates and placemats
  - Clear-up- clearing plates & scraping food into waste bins
- Encourage children to self-serve, e.g.:
  - Have bowls of food and spoons on the table
  - Staff could serve the main components of a meal, and ask children to dish up one element, e.g. a portion of fish pie could be served on the plate and children dish up their vegetables.



## Atmosphere

- Create a clean, warm, bright environment, without distractions
- Reduce distractions such as:
  - Adults moving frequently up & down between tables
  - Constant traffic of children coming to & fro
  - Overly stimulating resources nearby
  - Poor layout meaning every departure from the table disrupts other children.

## Social Time

- Sit children in small groups to ensure they can take part and be heard
- Practitioners should encourage relaxed & positive conversation, answer questions, & model behaviour
- Children should face each other so they can observe and learn from their peers.

### Encourage conversation about:

- Colours and shapes of food
- Where food comes from
- Activities from across the day
- Counting items on their plate

## Eating Well at Mealtimes

### Children should:

- Wash their hands before & after mealtimes
- Understand the importance of sitting down when eating
- Be encouraged to take turns, if self-serving
- Be supported to use cutlery and drink from open cups
- Be supported to learn about the sensory properties of food, through touch, taste & smell
- Understand the importance of not wasting food:
  - uneaten food can be left on the plate, and you could consider composting it.



## Staff

### Staff should:

- Prepare the dining environment in advance
- Ensure infants & young children are seated safely in a highchair or appropriate sized low chair
- Always stay with children and supervise
- Provide encouragement without pressure
- Understand that children won't always finish everything on their plate:
  - offer children dessert, even if they don't finish their main course
  - ensure children have the opportunity of second helpings, if requested
  - encourage children to recognise feelings of fullness and hunger.

