

**Group Policy: Mealtimes**

Policy Header:	Mealtimes
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**1. Policy Statement**

Flower Pots Nursery Group is committed to providing healthy, balanced, and safe mealtimes that foster independence and social development. We view mealtimes as a "primary learning opportunity" where children develop lifelong habits regarding nutrition, hygiene, and social interaction in a family-style environment.

**2. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to standardise food safety, hygiene, and pedagogical approaches to eating. It ensures all staff understand their role in preventing choking, managing allergies, and promoting a positive relationship with food.

**3. Objective**

- To ensure 100% compliance with Food Standards Agency (FSA) and EYFS requirements.
- To eliminate "waiting time" and maximise "learning time" during food service.
- To provide a safe, supervised environment that mitigates the risk of choking and cross-contamination.

**4. Scope**

This policy applies to all staff involved in the preparation, service, or supervision of food and drink, including snack times, within all Flower Pots Nursery settings.

## 5. Definitions

- **Family-Style Dining:** An approach where staff sit with children, modeling manners and conversation while children are encouraged to serve themselves.
- **Two-Step Cleaning:** A rigorous hygiene process involving first removing debris with soapy water, followed by a food-safe antibacterial sanitiser.
- **Safe Eating Position:** Children seated upright, feet supported where possible, and never left unsupervised.

## 6. Procedures

### 6.1 Hygiene and Food Safety

- **Personal Hygiene:** All staff and children must wash hands with warm soapy water before and after handling food.
- **Environment:** Eating surfaces must undergo the Two-Step Cleaning process before and after every meal.
- **Staff Training:** Only staff with a valid Level 2 Food Hygiene certificate may prepare or handle unsealed food.

### 6.2 Supervision and Choking Prevention

- **Active Supervision:** Children must be closely supervised at all times. One staff member must be seated at each table to engage with children and monitor for signs of choking or allergic reactions.
- **Positioning:** Children must not be seated for meals until food is ready for service to prevent boredom and restlessness.
- **Oral Health:** Fresh drinking water must be accessible at all times.

### 6.3 Allergy and Dietary Management

- **Meal Cards:** Every child with a dietary requirement must have a visible, clean, and intact Dietary Meal Card placed on their chair or at their setting.

- **Verification:** Staff must cross-reference food served against the child's Healthcare Plan and the nursery's daily allergy matrix.

#### 6.4 Independence and Pedagogy

- **Family Atmosphere:** Mealtimes must be calm and social. Staff must engage in meaningful conversation and model positive eating behaviors.
- **Self-Service:** Children should be encouraged to use child-sized utensils, pour their own water, and serve their own portions to develop fine motor skills and autonomy.
- **No Pressure:** A "no-pressure" approach is used for new foods. Positive reinforcement is used to build confidence without forcing a child to eat.

#### 6.5 Breastfeeding and Infant Feeding

- **Support:** Flower Pots is a breastfeeding-friendly environment; comfortable spaces are provided for mothers.
- **Storage:** Expressed milk must be clearly labeled with the child's name and date of expression, stored in a designated fridge at correct temperatures.
- **Bottle Safety:** Staff must hold babies during bottle feeds (unless developmentally ready to hold their own under direct supervision). Bottles must never be propped.

#### 6.6 Transition Management and Flow

- **Purposeful Transitions:** Mealtimes should be treated as a "soft transition." To avoid long periods of sedentary waiting, children should only be invited to the table once food is prepared and ready for service.
- **The "Rolling Snack" Model:** Where appropriate for the age group, settings may implement a "Rolling Snack" to allow children to continue with their In-the-Moment play, choosing to join the snack table when they are ready, thereby reducing disruption to deep engagement.
- **Predictable Cues:** Consistent, gentle cues (such as a specific song, a chime, or a five-minute warning) must be used to prepare children for mealtimes, helping



them feel secure and supporting their ability to manage their own self-care and transitions.

## 7. Working in Partnership with Families

### Collaborative Nutritional Support

- **Individualised Onboarding:** During the "Settling-In" period, the Key Person will conduct a detailed consultation with parents to document the child's weaning stage, food preferences, and cultural or religious dietary requirements. This information will be reviewed termly to adapt to the child's changing needs.
- **Transparent Communication:** Flower Pots is committed to daily transparency. Staff will provide detailed updates via the Family app, documenting not only *what* was eaten but also the child's engagement with new textures and their developing independence at the table.
- **Shared Expertise:** We recognise parents as the primary educators. If a child is a reluctant eater or has complex sensory needs regarding food, the nursery will work collaboratively with the family to create a "Consistent Approach Plan," ensuring the same positive reinforcement techniques are used at home and in the setting.
- **Home-to-Nursery Transition:** While food from home is restricted to ensure group-wide allergy safety, we welcome families to share traditional recipes or cultural food traditions. These may be integrated into our group menus to ensure the nursery environment feels familiar and inclusive for every child.

## 8. Multi-Tiered Allergy and Preference Management

To ensure the absolute safety of children with medical allergies and to respect individual dietary choices, Flower Pots Nursery Group operates a strict **Visual Identification System**. This color-coded protocol must be followed at every meal and snack time without exception.

### 8.1 Color-Coded Crockery System

All food and drink must be served using the following designated crockery:

- **RED Bowls/Plates: Strictly for Medical Allergies.** Any child with a diagnosed allergy or a medically required diet must only ever be served using red crockery.
- **YELLOW Bowls/Plates: Specific Food Preferences.** Used for children who have non-medical dietary requirements, such as religious observances (e.g., No Pork) or lifestyle choices (e.g., Vegan/Vegetarian) as advised by parents.
- **BLUE Bowls/Plates: Standard Menu.** Used for all other children with no specific dietary restrictions.

## 8.2 Staff Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

For hygiene and as a secondary visual safety check, staff sitting with children during mealtimes must wear the appropriate apron:

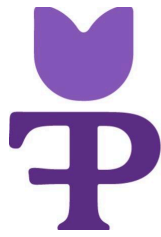
- **RED Aprons:** Worn by the staff member designated to sit at the table with children who have **Medical Allergies**. This alerts all other staff that a high-risk child is being supervised.
- **BLUE Aprons:** Worn by all other staff members sitting at tables or serving food.

## 8.3 The "Double-Check" Verification Process

To prevent cross-contamination or service errors, a mandatory Four-Point Check is required for every meal:

1. **Kitchen Outbound Check:** Before any food leaves the kitchen, the Chef or Kitchen Assistant must check the meal against the room's allergy matrix. This must be countersigned/verified by a Manager or Deputy.
2. **Point-of-Service Check:** When the food arrives in the room, it must be checked again by two separate practitioners. They must cross-reference the meal, the child's name, and the color of the crockery against the child's individual Dietary Meal Card before the plate is placed in front of the child.

## 9. Roles & Responsibilities



# Flower Pots

DAY NURSERY

- **Nursery Manager:** Responsible for the weekly menu audit, ensuring all staff have up-to-date Food Hygiene training, and managing the "Family-Style" rota.
- **Practitioners:** Responsible for the daily execution of mealtimes, recording intake on Family, and conducting the Two-Step cleaning process.
- **Quality Lead / SLT:** Responsible for unannounced mealtime "Pulse Checks" (Tier 1) to monitor supervision levels and the use of Dietary Meal Cards.

## 10. Compliance

Failure to follow allergy protocols or leaving a child unsupervised while eating is a Tier 1 Safeguarding Breach and will be dealt with under the Group's Disciplinary Procedure. All food from home is prohibited unless an "Exceptional Circumstance Agreement" is signed by the Manager.

## 11. References

- Statutory Framework for the EYFS (2024)
  
- Food Standards Agency (FSA): Food Hygiene for Early Years.
- Eat Better, Start Better: Voluntary food and drink guidelines.
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

<https://www.thesaferfoodgroup.com/knowledge/eyfs-2025-safer-eating-in-early-years-settings/>

Policy Authorised By: Nikki McNulty

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