

Group Policy: Mealtimes

Policy Header:	Mealtimes
Policy Number:	Ops - 002
Version:	2.0
Owner:	Quality & SLT
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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. Staff must also wash their hands before handling food and must use appropriate utensils, such as tongs, to transfer food from serving dishes onto children's plates.
- **Environment:** Eating surfaces must undergo the Two-Step Cleaning process before and after every meal and must be wiped clean of any food debris between courses.
- **Staff Training & Uniforms:** Only staff with a valid Level 2 Food Hygiene certificate may prepare or handle unsealed food. Kitchen Assistants must wear the uniform provided including aprons (not plastic unless serving in a room) at all times unless advised otherwise by a member of SLT.

6.2 Supervision, Choking Prevention, and Hydration

- **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.
- **Hydration Policy:** Only milk or water are offered to drink; no other drinks are to be brought into or consumed in the nursery. Marker pen must never be used on cups. Label makers are the only permitted method and any marked cups must

be replaced immediately. Equipment is stored in the kitchen and requests should be submitted to Jamie and Wayne.

- **Oral Health:** Fresh drinking water must be freely accessible at all times in indoor and outside areas..

6.3 Portion Control & Age-Appropriate Cutlery

- **Portion Control:** Staff must control portion sizes in line with page 17 of the *EYFS Nutrition Guidance* to ensure suitable portion control for the relevant age groups of children. (See Appendix 1)
- **Cutlery & Self-Feeding:** Children are to be provided with two pieces of cutlery and be encouraged and supported to independently feed themselves.

6.4 Independence and Pedagogy

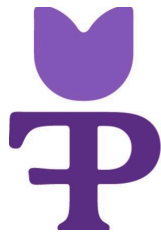
- **Family Atmosphere:** Mealtimes must be calm and social. Staff must engage in meaningful conversation and model positive eating behaviors.
- **Self-Service:** Children should be encouraged to use child-sized utensils, pour their own water, and serve their own portions to develop fine motor skills and autonomy. Children should self-serve or should be strongly encouraged to do so depending on their age.
- **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. These updates must be completed within 30 minutes of the snack/meal time finishing.
- **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 Procedure for Managing Medical Allergies

On enrolment, parents/carers must declare any allergies or dietary needs. An Allergy Health Care Plan is required for any child at risk of serious harm or anaphylaxis, supported by medical evidence where appropriate. A condensed plan and Medical Risk Assessment will be produced for rooms and must be read and signed by all staff.

Allergy medication will be stored in a labelled cliptop box containing the child's details and must accompany the child at all times. Children with confirmed allergies will have a red dietary card displayed at each mealtime.

All meals for allergy children must be prepared in the kitchen, covered, clearly labelled and served on a red plate. Allergy information must be displayed in kitchens and rooms and reviewed at least every three months.

8.2 Red Plate Procedure (High Risk)

The nursery operates a three-plate system to minimise cross-contamination. Any allergy breach requiring medication is a notifiable Ofsted event. The Room Leader or senior staff member must brief the team daily on children with dietary needs.

Children on red plates must be supervised by a designated senior staff member wearing a red apron and seated directly beside the child throughout the meal. The supervising adult must not serve other children or eat during supervision and must monitor the area after meals.

Red items indicate confirmed medical risk and must only be used for those children. A verbal handover with the kitchen is required before serving and foil lids must remain sealed until checked by Management or the Room Leader. All meals must carry a pre typed printed label. Red snack bowls must be used for weaning children with allergies and babies with allergens must use red-lid sippy cups. Bottles for allergy babies must display a photograph with a red allergy label. These controls are mandatory for safeguarding.

- **Second Servings Protocol for Red Plates:** For children on red plates, seconds must only be served by the kitchen assistants and witnessed and checked following the same procedures of the first servings and must only be plated in the kitchen.

8.3 Procedure for Religious & Cultural Dietary Preferences

Children with preferences will have a yellow dietary card displayed at mealtimes and their meals served on yellow plates. Where substitutions are required, meals must be prepared and covered in the kitchen.

Preference information will be displayed in kitchens and rooms and reviewed annually. Religious and cultural preferences relate to ethical or faith-based restrictions and do not include dislikes.

8.4 Color-Coded Crockery & PPE Summary

- **RED Bowls/Plates & Aprons (High Risk - Medical Allergies):**
 - Strictly for Medical Allergies. Any child with a diagnosed allergy or a medically required diet must only ever be served using red crockery.
 - Worn by the staff member designated to sit at the table directly beside children who have Medical Allergies. This alerts all other staff that a high-risk child is being supervised. The supervising adult must not serve other children or eat during supervision.
- **YELLOW Bowls/Plates & Requirements (Preferences & Intolerances):**
 - Yellow plates and cups are for religious or cultural preferences or intolerances (e.g., No Pork, Vegan/Vegetarian) as advised by parents.
 - Children should wear clear bibs and staff are not required to wear a red apron.
 - Yellow does not indicate medical risk, but children may require a Health Care Plan if they have an intolerance that may require non-emergency attention.
- **BLUE Bowls/Plates & BLUE Aprons (Standard Menu):**
 - Children without medical or cultural dietary needs must not use red or yellow items. Blue cups and plates must be used for all other children.
 - Blue aprons are worn by all other staff members sitting at tables or serving food.

8.5 Weaning

In line with NHS guidance, children should transition to a varied diet by around 10-12 months. Parents will be asked to introduce key allergens at home so they can be safely provided at nursery before the child's first birthday, except where restrictions apply.

8.6 Kitchen Preparation

Kitchen Assistants must reduce cross-contamination by preparing allergy meals first, maintaining strict hygiene, using separate utensils and clearly labelling all allergy foods. The Daily Dietary Sheet must be completed and signed by management before meals and the 14-allergen poster must remain displayed in line with EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation 2014.

8.7 Daily Dietary Sheet & "Four-Point Check" Verification Process

Each room must complete the Daily Dietary Sheet every morning. To prevent cross-contamination or service errors, a mandatory Four-Point Check is required for every meal:

1. **Daily & Kitchen Outbound Check:** Before each meal, management must check and sign the Daily Dietary Sheet in the kitchen. The Chef or Kitchen Assistant must check the meal against the room's allergy matrix and review meals with the senior room staff. This must be countersigned/verified by a Manager or Deputy.
2. **Point-of-Service Verification:** When the food arrives in the room, two staff members must verify each allergy child's meal. 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. All four required signatures must be present before serving.

9. Roles & Responsibilities

- **Nursery Manager:** Responsible for the weekly menu audit, ensuring all staff have up-to-date Food Hygiene training, managing the "Family-Style" rota, and verifying/signing the Daily Dietary Sheet in the kitchen before meals.
- **Practitioners:** Responsible for the daily execution of mealtimes, completing the morning Daily Dietary Sheet, conducting two-person verification before serving, recording intake on Famly, and conducting the Two-Step cleaning process.
- **Kitchen Assistants:** Responsible for preparing allergy meals first using separate utensils, maintaining strict hygiene, ensuring proper uniform/aprons are worn, serving all second helpings for red-plate children from the kitchen, and completing/reviewing dietary sheets with senior room staff.

- **Quality Lead / SLT:** Responsible for unannounced mealtime "Pulse Checks" (Tier 1) to monitor supervision levels, allergy management compliance, 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. Any allergy breach requiring medication is a notifiable Ofsted event. 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.
- EYFS Nutrition Guidance (Page 17)
- EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation 2014
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- [EYFS Safer Eating Guidance](https://www.thesaferfoodgroup.com/knowledge/eyfs-2025-safer-eating-in-early-years-settings/)

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Policy Authorised By: Nikki McNulty

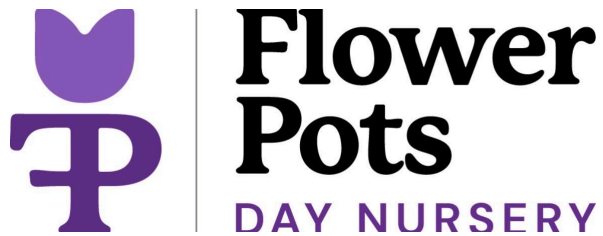
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Appendix 1

EYFS Portion Size Guidance - Age 1 - 4 years

Food Group	Example food item	Recommended portion size (per meal/snack)
Starchy Carbohydrates	Bread	$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 slice
	Cooked pasta/rice	2- 5 tablespoons
	Potatoes	1 - 2 small or 2 - 4 tablespoons
	Pitta bread/wraps	$\frac{1}{2}$
Fruit & Vegetables	Cooked vegetables	1 - 2 tablespoons
	Raw vegetable sticks	2 - 4
	Fresh soft fruits	$\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 small fruit or 3 - 5 berries
	Dried fruit	1 tablespoon
Protein (meat, fish, eggs, pulses)	Cooked meat	1 slice or 2 - 4 tablespoons
	Fish	$\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 small fillet or 2 - 3 tablespoons
	Eggs	1
	Beans, lentils, pulses	2 - 3 tablespoons
	Hummus	1 -2 tablespoons
Dairy & alternatives	Milk	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup
	Yogurt	2 - 3 tablespoons
	Hard cheese	1 - 2 tablespoons grated
	Soft cheese	1 - 2 tablespoons

Key Portion Control Principles for Staff:



- Visual Anchor: As a general rule of thumb, a child's single portion size is roughly what fits into the palm of their hand.

Early Start Nutrition

- Responsive Feeding: Children's appetites fluctuate daily. Staff should encourage children to listen to their satiety cues (e.g., turning away, closing mouth, playing with food) rather than forcing them to finish a plate.

Early Start Nutrition+ 1

- Second Helpings: If a child requests second helpings, staff must offer additional vegetables, salad, or fruit first before offering extra starchy carbs or proteins.
- Progression: Portion sizes should gradually increase as children transition from lower-age rooms into older groups