

Healthy Eating Policy

At Askea Community Childcare Centre we believe that good health, good food and drinks in the early years helps to safeguard children's well-being throughout their lives. It is important to promote the development of healthy eating and drinking habits for children from a young age, both for the pleasure of having a wide variety in their diets and for gaining knowledge about nutrition.

Mealtimes are treated as an opportunity for social interaction as well as laying the foundation for making healthy eating choices.

Principle of Healthy Eating

This policy is underwritten by the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 Regulations 10 and 22; The Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services)(Amendment) Regulations 2016; (Registration of School -Age Services) Regulations 2018; Department of Health and Food Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-School Services, 2006; Tusla's Quality and Regulatory Framework; and Siolta Standard 9 Health and Welfare.

Rationale:

"A child's early years are important for their future health and wellbeing, and good nutrition during this time lays a healthy foundation for all of childhood and life." [Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-school Services](#)

Eating a balanced diet is vital for good health and wellbeing. Food provides the energy, protein, essential fats, vitamins and minerals to live, grow and function properly. Children need a wide variety of different foods to provide the right amounts of nutrients for good health and development. The food a child eats in their early years influences their eating habits as they grow and develop. It is important to teach young children about healthy food choices and staying well hydrated, and to help them develop good habits and a healthy relationship with food from an early age.

The interactions relating to healthy eating are also important. [Siolta](#) Standard 9 Component 9.4 states that a quality service is proactive in supporting the development of healthy eating habits in children while supporting their enjoyment and appreciation of eating and drinking as a positive social experience.

The purpose of this policy is:

To specify the manner in which the service shall ensure that the food and drink provided to children attending the service is nutritious and complies with the dietary or religious requirements of the child.

To ensure that all children attending the service receive adequate, suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink, which takes their individual needs into consideration and ensures that their dietary requirements are appropriately met as well as any particular religious requirements their family may have.

To clearly outline for parent/guardians the service's approach to healthy eating including the ways in which sufficient, suitable and nutritious food and drink are made available to their child and how these are suited to their age and development and psychological as well as physical needs.

To ensure that all aspects of healthy eating are considered, that the interactions relating to eating and drinking are always positive and that the effect of poor nutrition on learning is considered.

To ensure that children with allergies and very young children are not put at risk of allergic reactions to food or drink or of choking.

To ensure that all staff members and all parents/guardians/carers of children attending the service understand the importance of healthy nutrition and that they clearly understand their respective roles and responsibilities in relation to the provision of healthy, safe and nutritious food.

To provide parents/guardians/carers with information regarding the food and drinks which are provided by the service and the types of foods they are encouraged to provide for their child in snack or lunch boxes.

To ensure that all staff are made aware of the importance of interacting with children during meal times to promote the children's social development and communication skills.

To facilitate access by staff to the quality guidelines relating to food and nutrition associated with the policy and the recommendations as to how these guidelines are to be implemented in the service.

This Healthy Eating Policy has been developed in line with the [Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-School Services](#), the [3 Week Menu Plan - A resource for Pre-Schools](#) and the [serving size](#) guide for pre-schools.

Policy Statement

At Askea Community Childcare Centre healthy eating and drinking is promoted. Our policy, in line with the 'Nutrition Standards for Early Learning and Care Services' is to provide all children attending the Centre with adequate, suitable, varied, healthy, nutritious, safe food and drinks which comply with the dietary or religious requirements of each child.

Our goal is to support children's psychological and physical well-being by helping them to "make healthy choices and demonstrate positive attitudes to nutrition, hygiene, exercise, and routine" - one of Aistear's learning goals.

We recognise that poor nutrition affects a child's physical development and that social behaviour and even learning functions are susceptible to the negative effects of poor nutrition and poor interactions relating to eating and drinking.

The interactions of staff with children at meal times are always positive and withholding food will never be used as a form of punishment.

Formula milk for young children must be provided by parents/guardians and ready to use. Staff will not make up formula feeds. Mothers will be supported to continue breastfeeding their children should they so wish.

All food will be stored, prepared and served using recommended food safety practices.

Our healthy eating policy is based on the following:

- We offer a wide variety of foods in Askea Community Childcare Centre
- Our food and drinks provided are nutritious and comply with the dietary or religious requirements of pre-school and school age children.
- We offer healthy food choices and tooth-friendly drinks frequently
- Children and parents' individual needs, requirements and preferences will be respected

- We accommodate special food needs of individual children (as far as resources allow and within the context of the service provided)
- We plan healthy, varied meals and snacks
- We help children learn to eat healthily
- We foster good dental health
- We foster good hand hygiene
- We encourage healthy eating at home

Procedure

To implement this Policy at Askea Community Childcare Centre we have the following procedures in place:

- All children will have adequate quantities of suitable food depending on their age, development and needs.
- We offer suitable sized portions in line with the recommended portion sizes (See Appendix 1).
- The main meal will include appropriate servings of protein, starch, dairy, vegetables and iron.
- The weekly menu will provide the children with a variety of different healthy foods and textures of foods.
- Any change in the menu will be signalled and any foods that are substituted will be of equal nutritional value.
- Full fat milk will be served with breakfast for preschool and school age children.
- Portable drinking water is available to children at all times.
- Children will have access to bread, crackers or fruit if they are hungry between scheduled meal and snack times.
- Children have access to outdoor play every day, weather permitting, to ensure they receive sunlight which makes Vitamin D in the body.
- Weekly menus are displayed in areas accessible to parents/guardians i.e. downstairs hall and upstairs hall. Menus are available to view and download on our website www.askeachildcare.ie. Should changes arise, any food will be substituted with a food of equal nutrient value.
- All rooms and kitchen will have a list of children with allergies and/or food restrictions/requests displayed. This list is reviewed and updated when additions or changes are requested by parent/guardian.

Meals provided are as follows:

- Children in the service for more than 5 hours per session (full day care) will be offered:
 - At least two meals (one hot) and two snacks, for example – breakfast, snack, lunch and snack. If children are in the service for a long day, an evening meal will also to be provided.
- Children in the service for up to 5 hours maximum per session (part-time day care) will be offered:
 - At least two meals and one snack, for example – breakfast, snack and lunch.
- Children in the service for up to 3.5 hours per session (sessional pre-school service) will be offered:
 - One meal and one snack – for example snack and lunch or breakfast and snack.
- Children in the service availing of ECCE for up to 3 hours per session will bring their own lunch.
- Where a child does not want the food offered for any reason, a healthy alternative will be offered.
- Clean and safe drinking water is available and accessible to children at all times.
- Milk to drink is offered with breakfast.

Mealtimes:

- All our meal and snack times are treated as a social occasion.
- Meal and snack times are relaxed and unhurried.
- We allow children to use their fingers to eat food and help to feed themselves.
- Tables are set up with the help of the pre-school children, with appropriate cutlery and tableware depending on the age and abilities of the children.
- Children are encouraged to take part in food preparation as appropriate, for example preparing fruit.
- Children will sit when eating or having a drink and seating is arranged to support social interaction with others.
- Staff sit with the children during meal and snack times and encourage good eating habits. Meal times are opportunities for children to sit, interact and be supported by their Key Educator.
- Children are encouraged to help clean away their items when they have finished eating and/or drinking.

Key Educators and their Key Children:

Key Educators and their Key Children practice the following procedures for meal times to promote healthy eating habits, children's social development and communication skills:

- All children should eat breakfast, either at home, or in the service if child has not eaten breakfast at home. Staff will ask parents each morning if their child has eaten breakfast and offer food as required.
- During breakfast routine, food will be offered and made available to all children.
- Key educator verbally notifies children that a meal/snack will be offered.
- Key educator will assist children to clear and prepare the table for food and drink.
- Children will wash and dry their hands before sitting at the table for a meal/snack.
- Children will be supported by their key educator to self-serve food and drink as appropriate.
- Key educator will sit and interact with the children while they eat, and support child to child communications.

- Key educator will encourage and support the children to feed themselves independently, according to their age and stage of development.
- Key educator will ensure that children are given enough time to eat.
- Key educator will support children to remove their crockery, cup, utensils to a tray when finished eating.
- Key educator will support children to clean the table with them.
- Key educator will support children to wash their hands after their meal/snack.
- Key educator will support children to choose a transitional activity while waiting for other children to finish their meal/snack.

While children are encouraged to eat and drink, they are never pressurised to eat and drink.

Children who have not eaten, or who are hungry, are offered:

- Food at times outside routine meal and snack times as required.
- An alternative food option during meal and snack times as required.
- Inform parents if child has not eaten as usual during the day.

Communicating and Sharing with Parents/Guardians:

- Parents /guardians are informed of this policy and its contents when they enrol their child in the service.
- Our food menus are circulated to parents/guardians and displayed on our notice board. The notice board is located in the hall way towards the Toddler Room.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged support our healthy eating policies and to offer menu suggestions.
- Recipes and food ingredients are available to parents/guardians. Please ask a member of staff if you require this information.
- Sources of information about healthy eating are available in the service e.g., leaflets/posters from Health Services Executive, An Bord Bia, etc.
- Parents /guardians of children with special dietary or religious requirements will be asked to provide as much information as possible about suitable foods in order that plans can be put in place to meet these requirements as far as resources allow. In some cases parents/guardians may be asked to provide food themselves.
- Preschool children's food and drink intake throughout the day will be recorded in the daily diaries; this will be shared with each child's parent/guardian at the end of the day.
- Parents/guardians will be advised if their child is not eating well and a plan put in place in cooperation with the parent.
- A breastfeeding mother will be provided with a suitable private space (depending on availability) if they wish to breastfeed their child.

Food allergies and food intolerances (including coeliac disease):

On enrolment and when updating information each year, Askea Community Childcare Centre seeks specific information about allergies/intolerances as part of the health information provided by parents/guardians. Specific questions are included in the Registration Form and the annual Information Update for existing children. See Administration of Medication Policy

Staff will be made aware of this information so that no child will be given access to a food to which they have a known allergy. Some common foods to which children may have allergies or intolerances include, but are not limited to:

- Peanuts and tree nuts
- Sesame and other seeds

- Fish and shellfish
- Dairy products
- Eggs
- Soya
- Wheat (gluten)

Any food allergy can potentially trigger a life threatening allergic reaction. To minimise this risk the following measures are in place:

- In the event of a child having an allergy an up to date chart will be kept in their room, the Manager's office and the kitchen with the name and photo of the child and the allergy type.
- When preparing food for the child great care will be taken to prevent any contamination of their food by the allergen they have to avoid.
- Children are encouraged to wash their hands before and after eating.
- The concept of never sharing food is promoted "sharing is caring but never share food".
- Eating is supervised and orderly with children sitting rather than walking around which increases the risk of exposure.
- Events that may increase the risk of allergic reaction (i.e. birthdays) are identified and consideration is given to how these events can be managed without excluding the child who has an allergy. See Birthdays Policy.
- As diagnosis may occur at any time parents/guardians /carers are reminded that it is their responsibility to notify the service if their child is diagnosed as being at risk for anaphylaxis.

The 14 top allergens served in the service's food will be noted on the daily menu board to inform parents/guardians/carers.

For further information on allergies please see Food Safety Authority Allergies and Intolerance.

Dietary, religious requests:

On enrolment and when updating information each year, Askea Community Childcare Centre seeks specific information from parents/guardians about dietary/religious requests for their child under the heading 'All about me' on the child's Registration form. This information can be amended by the parent/guardian when required.

Staff will be made aware of this information and recorded in the child's room so that no child will be given access to a food to which they are restricted. Some common foods to which children may have restrictions to are:

- Beef
- Ham
- Bacon
- Chicken
- Gelitan
- Cakes/buns

When preparing food for the child great care will be taken to prevent any contact with the food they have to avoid.

Breastfeeding:

- Our service will accommodate breastfeeding mothers by accepting expressed breast milk for bottle or cup feeding, and allow mothers to drop in during the workday to nurse their young child.
- Staff will follow strict health and safety guidelines for storing, warming, and serving infant milk to young children.

Supporting parent/guardian food choices:

- Children and their parents will be supported to make nutritious food choices.
- We will provide information and public health guidance that are available to parents to reinforce nutritious food choices for their child.
- Where a parent/guardian has a specific request regarding their child's diet, the service will be flexible and accommodating in considering the request.

Purchase of Food:

The food provided by the service is only purchased from reputable suppliers who comply with food safety practices. The food suppliers we use are:

- Deegan Fruit and Vegetable Supplies Kilkenny
- Rath's Londis Carlow
- Tesco Carlow

In the event that one or more of our food suppliers are unable to facilitate the provision of their products, the Manager/Kitchen staff will substitute the products with equal quality from a local supplier.

Storage of Food:

Storage of food complies with HACCP requirements and food safety guidelines are followed at every stage of food provision. Staff are trained in food handling and safety, i.e. Food Hygiene, HACCP Level 2, Allergens.

Food will be stored in clean environments according to health and safety guidelines appropriate to each product i.e. refrigerated, in closed press units, in sealable containers.

When prepacked food is opened it will be labelled with date it was opened, to record the revised expiry date of product.

Preparation of Food:

Preparation of food complies with HACCP requirements and food safety guidelines are followed at every stage of food provision. Staff are trained in food handling and safety.

Each meal is freshly prepared by kitchen staff in the service, in the designated kitchen. Food is delivered to rooms at meal times by kitchen staff as follows:

Breakfast/dinner/tea

- Individual plated serving of food on trays to Wobbler room
- Group servings on trolley to be plated by staff in the Toddler room
- Group servings on trollies, placed in lift to upstairs rooms to be collected by staff in children's rooms and to be plated by staff
- Food is served in children's rooms (see page 4)

- All trays, cups, crockery, utensils, used cloths and trollies are returned to kitchen after use for cleaning

Snacks

- Group serving on platters to be self-served by children under staff supervision (see page 4)
- All items used are returned to kitchen after use for cleaning

Any uneaten food may be retained in the room for child consumption provided it's serving, and consumption complies with HACCP and food safety guidelines.

Food provided by parents for their child to eat in the service:

- Parents must communicate to staff that they have provided food for their child in the child's bag. This food must have a label with the child's name and the date the food is provided.
- The food must be removed from child's bag when they arrive to the service and stored in a fridge until served.
- Should food require reheating the food must be facilitated under HACCP guidelines in the kitchen.

Please note that all foods must comply with our Healthy Eating Policy

Birthdays, special occasions, cultural events:

Staff will communicate with parents/guardians the services preference of nutritious foods instead of high-sugar treats, to balance birthday parties, special events and cultural events with healthy eating.

Staff will discuss with parents how the service can celebrate birthdays, and special events by non-food recognition, and fun-led activities for children.

However, should a parent wish to provide a cake/buns to support their child's birthday celebration with their peers, parents will be asked to provide a shop purchased cake/buns with labelled ingredients and expiry date attached.

Where parents feel they would like to provide more for their child's celebration events in the service, staff will encourage parents to donate a favorite storybook or culture item to their child's room instead of sending sweets for children to eat.

Children will be encouraged to try healthy foods from other cultures to promote an education and respect for other cultures and traditions.

Communication Plan for staff & families:

All parents/guardians are to be informed of the policy and procedures regarding Healthy Eating on enrolment. Staff members will check with parents/guardians that they have read and understood the policy and provide any assistance needed.

The Policy Statement will be included in the Parents/Guardians Handbook.

This policy will also be reviewed with the staff team at induction and annual staff training.

A copy of all policies will be available during all hours of operation to staff members and parents in the Policy Folder located in Reception.

Parents/guardians may receive a copy of the policy at any time upon request.

Parents/guardians and staff members will receive written notification of any updates.

Related Policies, Procedures

- Staff Training Policy
- Administration of Medication Policy – Food Allergies
- Birthdays Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Interactions Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Partnership with Parents Policy
- Behaviour Management Policy
- Communications Policy
- Key Educator Policy

References/Supporting Documents/Related Legislation:

- Tusla: Quality and Regulatory Framework
- Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016
- **Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Preschool Services**
health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Food-and-Nutrition-Guidelines-for-Pre-School-Services.pdf
- **Little Bites**
[www.safefood.eu/Education/Pre-school/Little-Bites-\(ROI\)/Healthy-eating.aspx](http://www.safefood.eu/Education/Pre-school/Little-Bites-(ROI)/Healthy-eating.aspx)
- **3 Week Menu Plan**
www.ncn.ie/images/3week_menu_plan_available_on_web.pdf
- **Serving Size**
www.safefood.eu/SafeFood/media/SafeFoodLibrary/Documents/Publications_1/G6101-Safefood-App-Port-Control-Guide_single-pages.pdf
- **Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute**
www.indi.ie/fact-sheets/fact-sheets-on-nutrition-for-babies-children/365-links-to-useful-resources-on-childhood-nutrition-a-guide-for-parents-and-teachers.html
- **Safe Food – Make a Start** Promotes healthy eating and food safety. Provides free to download resources on a range of childhood nutrition topics, including healthy lunchbox ideas.
www.safefood.eu/Start/Welcome.aspx
- **Bord Bia nutrition for two to fives**
www.bordbia.ie/consumer/aboutfood/nutrition/pages/nutritionfortwotofives.aspx
- **Irish Food Allergy Network** provides a guide to assist those who, through their work, encounter children and families affected by food allergy
www.ifan.ie
- **Early Childhood Ireland – Nutrition and Regulation**
www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/work/operating-childcare-service/nutrition/nutrition-and-regulation/
- Zero to Three, The Feeding Relationship www.zerotothree.org/resources/1071-the-feeding-relationship
- **Siolta Standard 9 Health & Welfare**

This policy must be observed by:

- Managers
- All staff members
- Parents/Guardians

Appendix 1

Offer suitable sized portions

The table below outlines the recommended numbers of daily serving sizes for different age groups

TABLE 3 – RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAILY SERVINGS AND PORTION SIZE			
FOOD SHELF	1-3 YEARS	3-5 YEARS	SERVING SIZE
Meat, Fish and Alternatives Shelf <i>Iron – to help healthy blood flow</i>	2 small servings	2 servings	An average sized pork or lamb chop or homemade beef burger 2 slices (60g) of lean roast/boiled/grilled/oven-baked meat or chicken/turkey Medium sized fillet of fish or 2 fish fingers 2 eggs 9 dessertspoons of baked beans, peas or lentils
Milk, Cheese and Yogurt Shelf <i>Dairy foods help bones to grow</i>	3 servings	3 servings	1 glass of milk ($\frac{1}{3}$ pint) 1 carton of yogurt 30g of hard cheese 2 cheese slices 1 bowl of milk pudding (100g)
Fruit and Vegetable Shelf <i>Fruit and veg to help you glow</i>	2-4 servings	4 or more servings	1 medium sized fruit (50g) e.g. apple, orange or banana $\frac{1}{2}$ glass of pure unsweetened fruit juice, diluted well with water 3 dessertspoons of stewed or tinned fruit in own juices or fresh fruit salad 3 dessertspoons chopped raw, salad or cooked vegetables Small bowl of home-made vegetable soup
Breads, Cereals, and Potato Shelf <i>Plenty of these to GO! GO! GO!</i>	4 servings	4-6 or more servings	1 slice of bread (white or wholegrain) 1 small bread roll 1 small bowl of breakfast cereal 1 small scone (plain, wholemeal or fruit) 1 medium potato (60g) – boiled or baked 3 dessertspoons of boiled rice or pasta (80g)