Ready Steady Grow Pre-School

Safeguarding and Welfare Requirement: Health

Food and drink

Policy statement

We recognise snack time and lunch club as essential parts of the daily routine, supporting children's health, wellbeing, independence and social development. We provide healthy, balanced and nutritious food and drinks, taking account of children's age, development, dietary, cultural, religious and medical needs. We follow the EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers effective 1 September 2026 and have regard to the Department for Education Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance, unless there is a good reason not to.
Parents providing packed lunches must follow our Healthy Eating Guidelines, supporting our whole-setting approach to good nutrition.
Our food and drink practice reflects strengthened EYFS expectations for safer eating and weaning. Eating is appropriately supervised; children are within sight and hearing of an adult while eating. Staff consider choking risk, allergies, individual development and safe food preparation at every snack and meal.

Procedures

1. **Gathering and Recording Dietary Information**
   - Before a child starts, parents must provide detailed information about dietary needs, allergies, cultural or religious requirements, and food preferences.
   - Dietary information is recorded on the Registration Form and must be checked and signed by parents.
   - Dietary needs are reviewed at least termly and updated whenever circumstances change.
   - All staff have access to up-to-date dietary/allergy information in accordance with our Managing Children Who Are Sick, Infectious or with Allergies Policy.

2. **Meeting Individual Dietary Needs**
   - Food and drink offered will always meet children's dietary requirements and parental instructions.
   - We never use dietary needs as a label or means of exclusion.
   - We operate a nut-aware environment and do not knowingly provide foods containing nuts or nut products. We cannot guarantee a completely nut-free environment because packaged foods may carry precautionary allergen labelling; individual allergy plans and risk assessments are followed.
   - Staff follow each child's allergy information and individual healthcare/allergy plan where required, check ingredient and allergen information every time, prevent cross-contact, and never guess whether a food is safe. Emergency medication must be immediately accessible to trained staff.

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- Parents of children with allergies may be asked to provide specific foods where appropriate.
- Where a child has a diagnosed allergy, intolerance, swallowing/feeding difficulty or other medical dietary need, we work with parents and relevant health professionals and make reasonable adjustments. Changes to ingredients, brands or recipes are checked before food is served.

3. Promoting Healthy Eating

We promote healthy eating through:

- Offering healthy, balanced and nutritious snacks in line with current DfE EYFS nutrition guidance, including a varied range of fruit, vegetables and other appropriate foods.
- Using meal times as opportunities for language development, social interaction, and learning about food.
- Encouraging children to explore a variety of tastes and textures without pressure, force, reward or punishment relating to food.
- Modelling positive eating behaviours.
- Providing culturally inclusive food options.
- Ensuring snack portions are appropriate for age and development.
- Foods, textures and portion sizes are appropriate to each child's age, development and eating skills. Foods are prepared to reduce choking risk; small round or firm foods are cut and prepared in accordance with current DfE/FSA safer-eating guidance.

4. Snack and Mealtime Organisation

- Snack time and lunch club are calm, social and inclusive experiences. Children are seated safely and appropriately supervised. In line with the EYFS from 1 September 2026, children are within sight and hearing of an adult whenever they are eating.
- Children are supported to develop independence by:
  - Choosing snacks
  - Pouring drinks
  - Serving themselves where appropriate
  - Clearing their eating area
- Suitable age-appropriate utensils and tableware are provided for all children.
- Staff remain alert to signs of choking or allergic reaction. At least one person with a current paediatric first aid certificate is available as required by the EYFS, and staff follow the setting's emergency and medication procedures.

5. Food Safety and Hygiene

- Food preparation, storage and handling follow current Food Standards Agency requirements and an appropriate food-safety management system. Where applicable, the setting uses relevant Safer Food, Better Business guidance and maintains food hygiene records.

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- Staff who prepare or handle food receive instruction, supervision and/or training appropriate to their duties and understand allergen management, cross-contamination and safe food preparation.
- Food is stored safely, with chilled items kept in refrigerators or insulated boxes.
- Water is available at all times, and children know how to access it independently.
- Milk is offered as an alternative drink at snack time.
- Food provided by the setting is planned with regard to the DfE Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance. Fresh drinking water is available and accessible at all times. Drinks and foods high in free sugars, salt or saturated fat are limited in line with current guidance.

6. Preventing Food Sharing

To protect children with allergies or medical needs:

- Children are not permitted to share or swap food at any time.
- Staff actively supervise all eating times, prevent food sharing where this could create an allergy or dietary risk, and ensure children remain within sight and hearing while eating.

7. Lunch Club (Packed Lunches Provided by Parents)

Parents are expected to follow our Healthy Eating Guidelines:

Parents must:

- Provide a clearly labelled lunch in an appropriate container.
- Follow our guidance promoting a healthy, balanced lunch appropriate to the child's age and needs, with foods prepared safely to reduce choking risk. Parents must clearly identify relevant allergens or dietary information where requested. Suitable examples include:
    - Sandwiches or wraps with nutritious fillings
    - Fresh fruit or vegetables
    - Yoghurt or other healthy dairy options
    - Water or milk

We discourage:

- Processed snack foods
- Chocolate, sweets, biscuits, cakes, pastries
- Sugary drinks
- Large portion sizes

Where a packed lunch does not meet the setting's healthy-eating or safety guidance, staff discuss this privately and supportively with parents. Food will only be withheld or replaced where there is an immediate safety, allergy or choking concern; the child will not be left without suitable food.

We will never shame or single out a child based on their lunch contents. All concerns are discussed privately with parents.

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8. Cultural, Religious and Ethical Needs

- We respect and accommodate all cultural, religious, and ethical dietary practices, including vegetarian and vegan diets.
- Staff discuss any queries with parents to ensure clarity and compliance.
- We avoid assumptions about diet based on culture or religion and agree requirements directly with parents/carers. Vegetarian and vegan diets are supported with attention to nutritional adequacy and individual needs.

9. Water and Hydration

- Fresh drinking water is available at all times.
- Children are encouraged to drink regularly throughout the day.
- Staff monitor hydration, especially during hot weather or physical activity.
- During hot weather, illness or increased physical activity, staff offer drinks more frequently and monitor children for signs of dehydration. Individual fluid requirements advised by health professionals are followed.

10. Communication with Parents

We keep parents informed by:

- Sharing our food and drink policy on induction
- Signposting families to healthy eating resources
- Providing updates on allergy management
- Offering support if parents need guidance on suitable lunchbox options
- Discussing concerns sensitively and confidentially
- Parents are informed promptly of any food-related incident, allergic reaction, choking episode or significant concern, in accordance with the setting's accident, incident, safeguarding and medication procedures.

Legal Framework

- Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers (effective 1 September 2026)
- Food Safety Act 1990 and applicable food hygiene legislation, including assimilated food hygiene requirements
- Food Information Regulations 2014 and applicable allergen/food information requirements
- Equality Act 2010 and Children and Families Act 2014 (reasonable adjustments and inclusion where relevant)

Further Guidance

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- Food Standards Agency food safety and allergen guidance, including relevant Safer Food, Better Business resources
- Department for Education: Early Years Foundation Stage nutrition guidance (current guidance)
- Department for Education: Help for Early Years Providers - Nutrition and children aged 1 to 5 years guidance
- London Borough of Bromley early years/SEND health support and current local public-health advice, where relevant