

Healthy Living

Making mealtimes social



Positive mealtimes are crucial for child development, rather than just being seen as a 'routine' it is a valuable aspect of nurturing a child's well-being. Through positive mealtimes, you can help children develop a range of skills such as communication, social competence, and physical skills. When repeatedly exposed to a range of food flavours and textures and provided with opportunities to practice basic skills such as, babies exploring foods with their hands, older children being introduced to using a fork and spoon, you are promoting a healthy approach to mealtimes. Babies and children can become confident communicators by imitating faces, listening to, and responding to attentive adults where they hear and learn new words – mealtimes provide the perfect opportunity to do this!

Task

- Reflect on mealtimes in your own setting. Do the children enjoy mealtimes? How do you know?
- What approach do you currently adopt to support children's well-being during mealtimes?

Is there anything you would like to improve? consider the indicators below:

- Adults interact with children ensuring snack/mealtimes are positive and welcoming.
- Are adults sitting with the children, enjoying their meals, and modelling trying new foods etc. alongside the children?
- Are children supported when they find mealtimes challenging – trying new foods, having to sit when they allowed to walk around at home etc.?
- Children's individual needs are met.
- The dining environment is inviting and encourages social mealtimes – is there adequate space, suitable utensils, age-appropriate furniture etc.
- Children are encouraged to be independent, eat well, develop good eating habits and social skills.
- Opportunities are provided for snack/mealtimes outdoors.
- The snack area is inviting.
- The waiting time is minimal.
- Parent/carers are supported in promoting positive mealtimes at home.
- Good standards of hygiene are met.

How can you further develop the above and embed the above in your own setting? Discuss with your team.

Useful links:

[Why Mealtimes are Crucial in Early Childhood Development \(kruzistroller.com\)](#)

[Eat Better, Start Better - Foundation Years](#) pages 46 – 47 and 49 - 54

[Food Policy Guidance for Early Years Settings - Early Start Group](#)

Be sure to explore the other Q cards around eating, mealtimes, snack time etc from the healthy living section.