09 Early years practice procedures

**09.7 Prime times – Baby and toddler mealtimes**

Feeding and mealtimes are key times in the day for being close and to promote security, as well as for exploration and learning. We understand the importance of a healthy balanced diet for young children.

**Toddler mealtimes**

* For the most part, older babies and toddlers who are feeding themselves have their meals in their space, with their key group and key person.
* Staff who are eating with the children must role-model hygiene, healthy eating and best practice at all times, for example not drinking cans of fizzy drinks in front of the children.
* Staff arrange the table before toddlers sit down; there should be no waiting time.
* Babies’ and toddlers’ hands are washed clean before their meal. 2D visuals are used if needed.
* Babies and toddlers are not discouraged from eating with their fingers; this exploration of their food with their hands is the beginning of self-feeding. When they have finished, they may wish to ‘play’ further with any remaining food. It is fine for them to get a bit messy; they, and their table can be cleaned afterwards.
* Babies and toddlers are given time to eat at their own pace and are not hurried to fit in with adults’ tasks and breaks.
* Mealtimes are relaxed opportunities for social interaction of toddlers with their group and the adults who care for them. It is a time of sensory learning and learning skills, as well as for the fundamental satisfaction of being fed.
* In order to protect children with food allergies or specific dietary requirements, children are discouraged from sharing and swopping their food with one another.
* While toddlers are mainly fed in their rooms, opportunities should be open for older children to be invited into their room for lunch, especially siblings, or children who have just moved up into the older group. There should also be opportunities for babies and toddlers to join the older children for, providing they do not find this unsettling or distressing.
* Lunchboxes are provided by the parents and stored outside supervised by a member of staff and brought in at lunch time. Children are supported to independently get their own lunch box and water bottle.
* Information for parents is displayed on the parent’s notice board, including:
* Ten Steps for Healthy Toddlers <https://infantandtoddlerforum.org/media/upload/pdf-downloads/HR_toddler_booklet_green.pdf>
* Daily menus including identification of any foods containing allergens