

## 09 Early years practice procedures

### 09.7 Prime times – Children’s 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, young children 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.
- Packed lunches are provided by the parents/carers.
- Staff arrange the table before children sit down; there should be no waiting time.
- Children’s hands are wiped/washed clean before their meal.
- Children 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.
- Children 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 children 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 swapping their food with one another.
- 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](https://infantandtoddlerforum.org/media/upload/pdf-downloads/HR_toddler_booklet_green.pdf)
  - Daily menus including identification of any foods containing allergens