

YMCA Stepping Stones Healthy Eating Policy

Department: Lifelong Learning

Owner: Head of Early Years and Childcare Development

Approval Route: DSS Board

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Policy Statement

The Nursery regards snack and mealtimes as an important part of our day. Mealtime represents a social time where children can learn about healthy eating. The Nursery provides snacks and meals which are healthy and meet children's individual dietary needs.

We recognise that healthier children learn more effectively and we strive to have an impact on health-related issues such as obesity and poor dental health which are significant factors not only nationally but particularly in Newham.

We understand that early food experiences have an important effect on adult eating patterns and may influence attitudes to eating, so YMCA Stepping Stones is committed to ensure that the provided food supports the development of healthy eating practices in future.

Aim of Policy

This policy is in place to inform parents and team members about nutrition and mealtimes at YMCA Stepping Stones. It is in place to help identify and cater for individual food requirements and to promote healthy eating in a relaxed atmosphere.

Development and implementation of the food policy

The Manager, in conjunction with the nursery team, has discussed related issues and has worked together to review this policy. Key staff continues to attend relevant training, and the needs of children 0-5 years have been taken into account in the light of the training received.

Aspects of Healthy Eating are raised with parents in several ways, including written information, displays, surveys and conversations with key staff. Menus are planned in advance, and parents and children are encouraged to contribute menu suggestions.

All food is prepared on site from scratch by experienced our cook. All staff associated with working with children have Food Hygiene level 2 certificates which renewed every 3 years.

The policy will be reviewed triennially, and the impact will also be assessed.

Information about eating environment

Meals are served for every group of children in their room. Older children's independence is encouraged by letting them take turns to hand out plates, cups, cutlery etc, then wash up, dry up and wipe the table after the meal if appropriate to their age and development.

Children sit together and are encouraged to pour their own drinks, serve, cut food as appropriate and then to clear away after they have finished. Cups, bowls and spoons are later washed by an adult in the kitchen to maintain hygiene standards.

Children, if they are slow eaters, never rushed to finish their meal.

Practitioners initiate a lot of conversation, table manners, and use of words such as 'please' and 'thank you'.

Staff sit with children whilst they eat to ensure they can see and hear the children. Staff are vigilant throughout mealtimes looking for signs of choking, allergic reactions and unsafe eating habits.

The areas, where children eat, are clean and bright- all tables cleaned before every meal with disinfectant. Older children use special individual (with children's names) plate-mats for setting the table- they are introduced to rules of setting table and polite table manners.

A display related to healthy eating and tooth brushing is located on the parents' information boards. Pictures of the children taking part in snack time or in cooking or tasting activities are often shared on social media. In or near the bathroom areas there are pictures relating to healthy practices such as hand washing.

The Nursery uses meals and snack times to help children to develop independence through making choices, serving food and drink and feeding themselves. Staff encourage children to try a bit of everything but not make a fuss if they don't want to. If the child shows fussiness about the offered meal, staff prompts children to eat the 'healthy' components of their meal before any 'treats'. Children are praised when they try something new.

Water is available for children to help themselves to, and additional water is provided (offered frequently) outside when the weather is hot.

Welcoming Atmosphere for Breastfeeding Families

Breastfeeding will be regarded as the normal way to feed babies and young children.

Mothers will be enabled and supported to breastfeed their infants in all public areas of premises whilst acknowledging that some mothers may prefer to feed in private. We will provide an appropriate private space.

Employees of YMCA Stepping Stones, who return to work whilst breastfeeding, will be supported in the continuation and maintenance of their lactation via expression of breast milk within a safe environment.

Breast Milk Policy

YMCA Stepping Stones participates in the active encouragement of mothers to breastfeed their babies. Therefore, the Nursery has put into place a Policy and associated Procedures to detail those arrangements necessary for the safe storage and use of breast milk.

Containers

- Breast milk should be brought to the Nursery in a sterilized bottle or in a sterile breast milk bag, suitable for the purpose of refrigerated storage and clearly marked with the infant's full name.
- Bottles will be returned to parents/carers at the end of each Nursery day. The containers will be washed but not sterilized.
- Parents must ensure that the container is sterilized before reuse.

Storage

Breast milk should be provided on a daily basis; unused milk will be discarded at the end of each feed.

Formula Milk Policy

On Delivery:

- Provide either: a carton of ready to use formula milk, a sealed pre- prepared formula powder as originally purchased or prepared formula powder in a sealed airtight container (with suitable pre-measured compartments which is named) alongside a suitable named bottle
- Provide suitable ready-made formula milk in cartons, which can be opened at Nursery then discarded at the end of the day. The Formula Milk carton is to be warmed as advised on the carton itself.

Introducing solid food

All mothers will be encouraged to breastfeed exclusively for the first 6 months and then as a complement to appropriate solid foods until 2 years or beyond, as mother and baby desire. They should be informed that solid foods are not recommended for babies under six months (UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative 2008).

All information and resources about the introduction of solid foods should reflect the Department of Health recommendations.

All parents, during their induction to the Nursery, will discuss when and how to introduce solid food including:

- that solid food should be started at around six months
- babies' signs of developmental readiness for solid food
- how to introduce solid food to babies
- appropriate foods for babies
- where to access additional information about the introduction of solids

Information on meals, snacks and drinks provided

The cook has completed training on providing healthy and nutritious meals and snacks and use guidelines from this training to compile a 3-week menu. The menu complies with the guidelines on providing a balance of starchy foods, protein, dairy and fruit and vegetables.

The Nursery organises meals and snack times so that they are social occasions in which children and staff participate. The Nursery provides children with utensils that are appropriate for their ages and stages of development. Nursery staff will provide feedback to parents regarding how their children have eaten through feedback sheets or verbal accounts at the end of child's day.

Meals/snacks

Nursery provides three meals and two snacks in between them.

- Breakfast is served between 8:00am and 8:45am
- Morning - 10:15am
- Lunch - 12:00pm
- Afternoon snack - 2.00pm
- Dinner - 4:30pm

We offer fresh fruit and vegetables every day for a snack and all other meals enhanced with wide offer of fresh and cooked vegetables and salads.

The Nursery menu includes a variety of foods from the four main food groups:

- Meat, fish and protein alternatives
- Dairy foods
- Grains, cereals and starch vegetables
- Fruit and vegetables

The Nursery takes care not to provide foods which contain nuts or nut products and is especially vigilant where we have a child or adult who has a known allergy to nuts.

We provide nutritious food at all snack and mealtimes, avoiding large quantities of fat, sugar and salt and artificial additives, preservatives and colourings- low salt and sugar varieties are purchased and tinned vegetables and fish are in spring water rather than oil or salted water.

In pre-school, children are asked to take a small portion initially and then they can have more, if they wish. Children are encouraged to eat all what they put into their plates by themselves.

Practitioners make notes how much every child ate- detailed reports will be given to parents in the evening. If a child constantly eats little or disposes of large amounts of food, the practitioners are advised to express their concerns to a member of the Management Team.

The Nursery includes foods from the diet of each of the children's cultural backgrounds, providing children with familiar foods and introducing them to new ones.

The Nursery provides a meat/fish option every day and a vegetarian alternative.

A salad is placed in a separate bowl for the children to help themselves to- staff encourages children to help themselves to salad explaining how important it is to eat vegetables.

Depending on availability, children are offered a variety of different options for a snack throughout the week: vegetables/fruit (apples, carrots, oranges, pears, tomatoes, strawberries, bananas, etc.) for the morning snack and starchy food for the afternoon meal.

Individual dietary requirements required for medical or cultural reasons will be respected and, where possible, catered for. Parents are encouraged to work with the Nursery Management Team creating the menu which is mostly suitable for all (and their child individually) children, that there may no need to provide the food for the child from home.

All eating problems (like fussy eating) will be discussed in a supportive and sensitive manner- offered strategies, courses in local Children Hub, close monitoring and daily feedback for parents. All exemptions should be discussed and agreed prior to any further actions.

We will gather information from parents regarding their children's dietary needs, including any allergies, during initial conversation on accepting the child to the Nursery. Where appropriate we will work alongside parents to put into place an individual diet plan for their child in a way to define possible allergies, while at the same time encouraging parents to get the allergy source confirmed by the doctor.

Drinks

The Nursery provides cow's milk and a non-diary alternative drink for children with lactose intolerance. All children in the Nursery are offered milk every day alongside their daily meals.

Water is freely available to all children and staff. Children are encouraged often to have a drink, especially on hot days.

No other drinks are offered to children instead of milk or water.

Packed Lunches and/or teas

The government states that the childcare funding is only intended to cover the cost of delivering 15 or 30 hours a week of free, high-quality, flexible childcare. It is **NOT** intended to cover the cost of consumables (including food). In some cases, parents and carers may chose not to have the meals provided, in this case parents are urged to be responsible in ensuring that packed lunches are as healthy as possible.

Children, eating packed lunches, sit alongside their peers at the table in their rooms and are encouraged, in the same way, to eat what has been provided for them and not waste food. They should not be throwing away uneaten items at Nursery, so that parents are aware of what their child has consumed at Nursery.

We aim to encourage children to bring healthy packed lunches with a variety of foods. Practitioners and other staff on duty in the rooms are encouraged to express any concerns they may have regarding any children that consistently bring unsuitable options in their packed lunches. Management or nominated people for Early Help will then follow up with parents and monitor situations, as necessary.

As fridge space is limited in the Nursery, parents are advised to bring packed lunches in insulated bags with freezer blocks, where possible, to stop the food spoiling.

Please be aware we are unable to heat any food provided. All food should be labelled with contents including allergens, for the safety of others.

Children will not be allowed to share the contents of their packed lunches or teas.

There is a number of ways to keep packed lunches cold:

- commercial gel packs
- water frozen in a rigid, leak-proof plastic container
- ice cubes in a leak-proof container

Guidance for what to include:

Every day:

- At least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables
- Meat, fish or other source of non-dairy protein (e.g. lentils, kidney beans, hummus, falafel)
- A starchy food (e.g. bread, pasta, rice, couscous, noodles, potatoes or other types of cereals)
- Dairy food (e.g. milk, yoghurt, cheese or custard)

It is recommended that an oily fish (e.g. salmon) should be included around once every three weeks.

Drinks: Only water (still), milk, yoghurt or milk drinks.

Guidance for what **not to** include:

- Snacks, such as crisps. Instead, include savoury crackers or breadsticks.
- Confectionery such as chocolate bars and especially sweets. Cakes and biscuits are allowed but encourage your child to eat these only as part of a balanced meal
- Meat products such as sausage rolls, individual pies, corned meat and sausages/chipolatas should be included only occasionally
- Fizzy drinks
- Please be aware that we do have children and team members with severe allergies to nuts – thank you for not including them in your child's packed lunches.

Food Allergies and special dietary requirements

The Nursery follows these procedures to promote healthy eating for children with special dietary requirements/allergies/intolerance. Also, we understand the importance to maintain high standards of safety ensuring that children with special requirements:

Before a child starts at the Nursery, parents provide details about their child's dietary needs and preferences, including any allergies.

Where appropriate we will work alongside parents to put into place an individual diet plan for their child in a way to define possible allergies, while at the same time encouraging parents to get the allergy source confirmed by the doctor.

Each child's dietary needs are recorded in the Children's Personal Details Record and Food Allergies folder, where parents sign the form to confirm that dietary information is correct.

Parents are regularly consulted to ensure that the records of their children's dietary needs are up-to-date. Parents sign the updated record to confirm that dietary information is correct. The cook has a pre-start meeting with any parents whose children have dietary needs.

The Nursery displays current dietary information about individual children at the sign-in station in rooms and in the kitchen, so that all staff are fully informed of them.

The whole team of management, practitioners, assistants and cook must stay vigilant and continue to clearly communicate when taking food from the kitchen and delivering to children at the table DAILY:

- Management must keep "allergies' folder", information in the kitchen and rooms up to date
- The cook must check the info in daily children register book (next to the entrance and information held in the kitchen (on the fridge). If information is different- raise the concern in the office immediately.
- For additional awareness use colour coded plates/bowls for allergies or dietary requirements.
- Assistant/practitioner, before delivering the food to the room, must check what children present at the mealtime and precisely ask cooks for a personalised dish.
- When delivered to the rooms, meals must be served with extra care and awareness for allergies and intolerances.

The Nursery implements systems to ensure that children only receive food and drink that is consistent with their dietary needs and preferences, as well as their parents' wishes.

The Nursery takes care not to provide foods which contain nuts or nut products and are especially vigilant where we have a child or adult who has a known allergy to nuts.

Nursery staff will show sensitivity in providing for children's diets and allergies. Staff does not use a child's diet or allergy as a label for the child, or make the child feel singled out because of his/her diet or allergy. Nursery staff will provide feedback to parents regarding how their children have eaten through EY Works or verbally at the end of the day.

In case of any incident in following dietary requirements, inform parents immediately and follow parents' advice provided on regularly updated Food Alert Forms. Information on form is checked every September and April by manager and signed by parents.

Celebration of birthdays and special occasions

Celebrations are ideal for encouraging children to look for and to talk about kindness to others, sharing and to celebrate their family events and achievements. This could be done, for example, at birthdays, Mothers', Fathers' and Grandparents' Day and at circle times.

Parents are not encouraged to bring in any food for birthdays or special occasions. However, if they feel it is necessary, the nursery staff will send the treat home with children for parents to decide if to give it to their child.

Cakes, sweets, crisps, etc are not allowed in the Nursery. If those brought - the food will not be given to children but sent back home at the end of the day.

If there is an occasion (Family Celebration or leavers' day) when food has been brought in from home, then the food will be laid out and clearly signed (labels "brought in from home" with all ingredients listed) for parents to decide whether they would like their child to have it.

Food preparation, storage and food safety

YMCA Stepping Stones is committed to ensure that safe and healthy practices around the storage, preparation and service of food are maintained throughout the setting.

It is the responsibility of the Manager to ensure that all members of staff, involved in food preparation, are fully trained in Food Hygiene and that all members of staff understand and implement the policy.

It is the responsibility of all members of staff to ensure that safe practices are maintained in the preparation and storage of food and that all food hygiene practices comply with relevant legislation, training and policy.

Personal Hygiene

The setting has set high standards of personal hygiene for all members of staff involved in the handling and preparation of food.

Members of staff will be responsible for ensuring that any children involved with preparation of snack follow strict hygiene procedures (e.g. hand washing before handling food). In addition, any person showing signs of ill health will not be permitted to handle food.

Temperature Control

It is the policy to ensure that all foods are stored according to safe food handling practices and at the correct temperature in order to prevent the growth and multiplication of food poisoning organisms, to reduce the rate of food spoilage and to ensure that food quality is maintained.

It is the policy of YMCA Stepping Stones to check and record fridge temperatures daily to ensure that the correct temperature is maintained (reminder of correct temperatures is on the fridge door as a sticker) – this is done daily by the cook.

Food storage

All food is stored in the kitchen, or in room fridges.

The kitchen is supplied with a fridge for fresh, freezer-for frozen foods. High shelves and cupboards- to keep dry foods.

The cook is responsible for cleanliness of all storages- cleanliness must be maintained daily by cleaning any spills immediately. Twice a year the more thorough cleaning is advised.

Food preparation areas

All meals and snacks are prepared in the kitchen or room kitchenettes by qualified/trained members of staff.

All surfaces are cleaned before and after any food handling, colour coded chopping boards are used to avoid any food contamination.

If snack preparation is used as children's cooking activity- strict hygiene rules are followed in the rooms too (tables cleaned, aprons, gloves and cook's hats are used).

Staff qualifications

Under the Food Safety Act, 1990, persons preparing food must hold Food Hygiene certificates or have been given initial training in the food hygiene procedures of the Nursery.

In July 2024 the Nursery was awarded a 5 Star rating given by Food Standards Agency for very good standards in food hygiene. The rating is based on a review of systems and processes as well as the actual practice the inspector sees on the day of their 'no notice inspection'.

Communicating the policy to parents

Nursery strives to promote healthy eating habits and good nutrition amongst children and their families by creating displays, offering leaflets, by daily chats and organised parents' evenings, where we share Nurseries philosophy and explain how healthy eating and good nutrition are an integral part of the curriculum for children.

Appendix 1

How does the policy link in with the curriculum and EYFS

Learning about food is integrated into our educational planning in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum. Staff are encouraged to attend training (Nutrition and wellbeing award) about healthy eating, also participate in staff meetings where practical ideas and encouragement is provided.

Practitioners are encouraged to use every opportunity to talk about healthy food and lifestyles during the day- during the free play, mealtimes or planned activities.

- **PSED (Personal, Social and Emotional Development)**
- Mealtimes offer children experiences to taste different foods, overcome dislikes and learn how to share.
- Cooking activities offer opportunities for learning through working with others and increasing self-esteem
- **PD (Physical Development)**
- Fine and gross motor skills can be developed through activities such as gardening, using knives and forks, preparing food and washing up.
- Mealtimes can be used to help children make healthy food choices.
- **L (Literacy)**
- Many stories involve food. We use these to learn about ingredients, where food comes from (growing in the garden, harvesting and cooking and eating), and about food for special occasions from different cultures.
- Language can be developed and senses explored through discussing and describing the taste, texture, size, look and smell of food.
- **M (Mathematics)**
- Activities such as counting out spoons or pieces of fruit when setting the table at snack time can support numeracy skills.
- Sorting and matching foods into different types can help promote organisational skills and reasoning.
- **CL (Communication and Language)**
- Sitting together around the table is a good way to teach conversation and social skills such as looking after neighbours.
- **UW (Understanding the World)**
- Food tasting activities teach children about ingredients, the seasons and where food comes from including food from different cultures.
- Growing fruit and vegetables teaches children where food comes from, life cycles, about gardening and looking after plants, and it's a good form of physical activity.
- **ExAD (Expressive Arts and Design)**
- Art activities can encourage children with food and alert them to colours and shapes.

Appendix 2

Cooking with children

Cooking with children is an enjoyable activity and an effective way to encourage all children to try and eat a wide range of foods. Practitioners are encouraged to do cooking activities at least once a week.

Recipes are chosen to promote and encourage healthy diets and extend family experiences. All recipes involve mixing, combining and assembling activities such as dips, cupcakes and scones, layered fruit and yoghurt pots.

Activities are well planned to be as safe as possible. Children may need help from their adult and the activity is carefully supervised by staff. In the event sweet foods such as cakes or biscuits are made these are eaten here as part of a meal, or taken home to do so, to best protect dental health.

Protecting children's health - being active

The nursery takes seriously a responsibility to protect children's health, including helping children to maintain a healthy weight as they grow, and encouraging breastfeeding and good dental practices. We are working towards Baby Friendly Initiative and have a clear policy about infant feeding.

Nursery promotes health and development in relation to diet and being active in relation to maintaining a healthy weight. We signpost to health professionals if there is a known concern that children are gaining weight too rapidly or are growing too slowly, or if there are concerns about a child's eating behaviour for dietary advice.

We promote by giving leaflets about Healthy Start vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C and D for children aged 6 months until their fourth birthday, and for adults who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Regular physical activity during the early years provides immediate and long-term benefits for physical and psychological well-being. We actively and through displays promote that all children aged under five years should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (being restrained or sitting) for extended periods (except time spent sleeping).

We include physical activity in all sessions, e.g. walking, active play and games, and offer some purely physical activity sessions too. Children are more likely to maintain a healthy weight if they are physically active for at least 180 minutes (three hours) each day, as recommended for children aged under five years in the UK (Department of Health). The nursery encourages practitioners to use outdoors areas as much as weather permits by promoting a free flow between the room and outdoors or organizing outdoors' time at least for 2 hours per day in colder seasons.