SECTION 7

Designing Mealtime Approaches



Designing mealtime approaches

Every ECEC service creates mealtimes that work for their unique context, balancing children's needs, staffing patterns, space, and how food is sourced. This section provides a toolkit of mealtime approaches that services can choose from and adapt: structured group meals, progressive time windows, lunchbox routines, outdoor eating, and flexible overlays for cultural celebrations or individualised support. Whatever approach you choose, the foundations remain the same: responsive feeding, safety, autonomy, and inclusion.

Mealtime models framework

Why this framework matters

Mealtimes in ECEC are more than eating; they're everyday rituals where belonging, learning, connection, language, self-help, and self-regulation grow. The entries below describe each mealtime type (definition), what it looks like in practice (elements/characteristics), and what to expect (pros/cons). They're written in food-neutral, inclusion-first language so services can plan confidently and adapt for every child.

How to read the framework

Each 'Mealtime type' highlights a different way of providing food to children: timing (structured vs progressive), serving method (shared meal/shared platters), food source (lunchbox), or location (outdoor).

Three 'overlays' can be added to any mealtime type:

1. adapted/individualised
2. cultural/celebration
3. one-to-one/small-group

You can tailor food access, safety, culture and relationships without changing your service's preferred model of meal structure.

Regardless of mealtime type, the following foundational practices should be included:

- Responsive feeding practices are used.
- A predictable mealtime routine is in place.
- Children are seated when eating to reduce choking risk.
- Food is served in safe, manageable pieces and textures relative to developmental stage.
- Allergy/cross-contact controls are in place.
- Hygiene/temperature management procedures are followed.
- Equitable access (e.g., early/late provisions or gentle prompts so no one misses out).
- Mealtime talk stays respectful and non-judgemental (e.g., 'don't yuck my yum').
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and visual supports available.

How to use the framework

Choose and combine the mealtime type(s) that fit your setting and will work with the children attending the service. You can add individualised support, cultural celebrations, or small-group arrangements to any mealtime type when needed.

Use the Elements/Characteristics to plan staffing, environment and routines; use Pros/Cons to anticipate trade-offs and add simple mitigations. For example, tick off who has eaten, batch and cover food, set timing cut-offs, rotate roles, co-design with families, and include appropriate procedures for children with food allergies and other special dietary needs. The aim isn't uniformity, it's safe, dignified participation and rich learning for every child.

Reflective questions

Educators

- *How effective is your current approach to managing food safety during mealtimes? How do you support casual staff to effectively manage food safety?*
- *To what extent are your mealtime experiences child-centred? How do you involve children in decision-making?*
- *How flexible is your service's approach to mealtimes in meeting children's individual needs and rhythms? How can you support your team with this?*

TABLE 5: *Mealtime models framework*

Structured mealtimes

Children and educators come together at consistent, predictable times to share food and conversation. Educators sit with children and eat comparable foods, modelling calm, respectful interactions and responsive feeding (adults decide the menu/time/place; children decide whether and how much). Distractions such as screens and toys are minimised; routines are stable yet allow reasonable flexibility (e.g., early/late provisions) so no child goes hungry. Practices are adapted for allergies/food safety, cultural safety, sensory needs, and trauma-informed inclusion, with intentional mealtime talk that links to learning.

Characteristics

- **Timing/structure:** fixed, predictable sittings (e.g., morning tea, lunch); transition cues; adequate time to eat.
- **Grouping:** whole group (split to small tables if needed); everyone eats together.
- **Serving method:** pre-plated, self-served by children, or educator-served; simple self-help roles (pouring, clearing) where appropriate.
- **Educator role:** sit with children; model calm, respectful, food-neutral dialogue; link talk to learning.
- **Autonomy:** responsive to children's appetite (children decide whether/how much); right to decline; water always available.
- **Safety/hygiene:** handwashing (before and after eating), temperature control, choking risk checks, allergen plan/seating/utensils.
- **Inclusion:** sensory adjustments (quiet spots, smaller tables), visual/AAC supports, trauma-aware tone.
- **Monitoring/comms:** observe who has eaten/participated; reasonable flexibility (early/late provisions).

Pros & cons

Pros

- Predictable routine supports regulation and a sense of safety/belonging.
- Whole-group experience strengthens community and shared norms.
- Easier to observe participation and check who has eaten.
- Simple to timetable; cleaning and setup happen in one block.
- Clear platform for intentional mealtime talk linked to learning.

Cons

- Inflexible timing may override individual hunger/sensory cues.
- Interrupts deep play; difficult transitions for some children.
- Noisy/busy group can overwhelm sensitive learners.
- Risk of pressure (finish quickly/finish everything) if not monitored.
- Less individual autonomy over when to eat.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

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Indoor Communal Mealtimes (seated or gathered, indoor shared meal)

A seated, indoor shared mealtime where educators and children eat together at tables, or on picnic rugs on the floor (dependent on child needs) to build connection and mealtime dialogue. Food may be offered from shared platters, educator-served dishes, or individual plates as appropriate. Children self-serve with guidance where safe; alternatives are provided for allergy, cultural, sensory, or trauma-aware needs so every child can participate with dignity. Educators co-dine, model calm, food-neutral conversation, and link the experience to learning.

Characteristics

- **Structure:** seated, indoor shared meal; predictable routines; small tables.
- **Serving method:** pre-plated, self-served by children, or educator-served; simple self-help roles (pouring, clearing) where appropriate.
- **Educator role:** co-dine at the table; model manners and food-neutral talk; facilitate inclusive conversation.
- **Autonomy:** children choose what/how much; second helpings available; spills treated as learning.
- **Safety/hygiene:** serving utensils only; allergen-safe plans (separate serves/placements/clean up food spills quickly); seated-only eating.
- **Inclusion:** adaptive utensils, pre-cut textures, visual/AAC; sensory seating options; trauma-aware pace.
- **Learning links:** fine-motor/self-help (tongs, pouring), counting/turns, respectful food dialogue.

Pros & cons

Pros

- Belonging and peer culture through eating together.
- Autonomy in what/how much; strong fine-motor/self-help practice.
- Rich opportunities for respectful food dialogue and manners.
- Positive peer modelling can broaden food acceptance over time.
- Shared routines build responsibility and cooperation.

Cons

- Higher cross-contact risk; strict allergen controls required. Exclusion of children with multiple food allergies.
- Messier and slower; more setup/cleanup time.
- Can be overwhelming for some children (noise, proximity, smells).
- Uneven participation if confident children dominate serving.
- Greater educator attention/skill needed to keep non-pressured.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

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Outdoor shared meal experiences

Outdoor shared meal experiences where children and educators eat and are seated outside (picnic tables/blankets). Designed to connect with place/Country and wellbeing while maintaining safety, hygiene and inclusion.

Characteristics

- **Location:** seated outside (picnic tables/blankets); shade/UV and weather plan.
- **Structure:** calm pace; seated-only eating to reduce choking risk; contingency to move indoors.
- **Safety/hygiene:** handwashing access (use wipes for children as hand sanitisers do not remove allergens); clean surfaces; pest management; temperature control for food transport/holding.
- **Educator role:** co-dine; link to place/Country (e.g., Acknowledgement of Country); nature-based conversation prompts.
- **Inclusion:** sensory-aware spaces; AAC/visual supports; allergen plans and adrenaline devices (e.g., EpiPen) travel with the group.
- **Sustainability:** waste/compost systems; reusable crockery and cutlery.

Pros & cons

Pros

- Connection to place/Country; high engagement and curiosity.
- Sensory benefits (fresh air, nature sounds) can support regulation.
- Strong curriculum links (eco-/place-based learning).
- Memorable community feel; novel context for mealtime talk.
- Opportunities for stewardship (waste sorting, caring for place).

Cons

- Weather/UV/insects; reliable contingency needed.
- Food safety during transport/holding is more complex.
- Distractions; supervision coverage across a larger space. Distractions and deviation from normal routines can be a food allergy risk.
- Increased choking risk if children move about (requires seated-only rule).
- Extra logistics (handwashing access, equipment, cleanup).

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

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Lunchbox/brought from home meals

Children eat food provided by families. A seated, indoor or outdoor shared mealtime where educators and children eat together to build connection and mealtime dialogue.

Food from home is not shared between children; the shared experience is conversation, routines/rituals and inclusion.

Characteristics

- **Food source:** family-provided meals; no sharing/trading or swapping between children.
- **Structure:** seated mealtime with educators present; calm, non-judgemental tone.
- **Safety/hygiene:** storage/temperature control; checks for choking risk foods; allergen plans and seating/utensils.
- **Educator role:** open containers as needed; model respectful dialogue; celebrate food diversity without value judgements.
- **Autonomy:** child chooses what/how much from their lunch; water available; support self-help (opening, packing away).
- **Equity:** service backup options if food is insufficient; plain-language guidance to families (food-neutral).
- **Learning links:** conversations about culture/family, routines, waste sorting/reusables.

Pros & cons

Pros

- Strong family partnership and cultural continuity.
- Builds self-help (opening, packing away) and ownership.
- Lower kitchen demands for the service.
- Clear boundaries (no trading) support safety and dignity.
- Natural platform for inclusive, non-judgemental mealtime talk.
- Provision of familiar/safe foods.

Cons

- Variable contents/volume; may not align with service nutrition guidance or include all core food group components.
- Choking-risk items may be present; limited service control over what is packed; requires vigilant checks and seating/serving plans.
- Allergen risks; need for clear labelling, seating, and utensil controls.
- Visible differences in lunches can raise equity concerns.
- Limited exposure to new/different foods compared with service-provided menus.
- Risk of cuts from lids of tins such as tuna cans
- Mealtimes may take longer due to extra time needed for opening lunchboxes, wrapping, individual containers and/or deciding what to eat.

Additional food safety & food allergy management

- Families will provide safe food for their children with food allergies.
- The lunch box or food brought from home must be labelled with the child's name and their allergies.
- Always need to supervise children when they are eating.
- Ensure that children do not swap foods.
- Need a contingency for provision of safe foods for the child with allergies in case the lunch box is dropped, or food is spilled.

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Overlay elements

Mealtime overlays provide flexible ways to tailor any mealtime model to children's needs without changing the service's overall approach to meal structure.

The three overlays, adapted/individualised, cultural/celebration, and one-to-one/small-group (outlined in Table 6 overpage), can be applied to any mealtime type to support inclusion, safety, culture and relationships. Overlays allow educators to make intentional adjustments to the environment, supervision, communication supports and routines, ensuring all children can participate with dignity. They are designed to complement, not replace, core responsive feeding practices and should be planned thoughtfully, implemented consistently and reviewed regularly in partnership with families and, where relevant, allied health professionals.

Reflective questions

Cooks/Nominated supervisor

- *How do you work with educators to effectively manage food safety?*
- *What adaptations would you need to make in your menu planning and food service to support flexible mealtimes? (e.g. progressive mealtimes)*

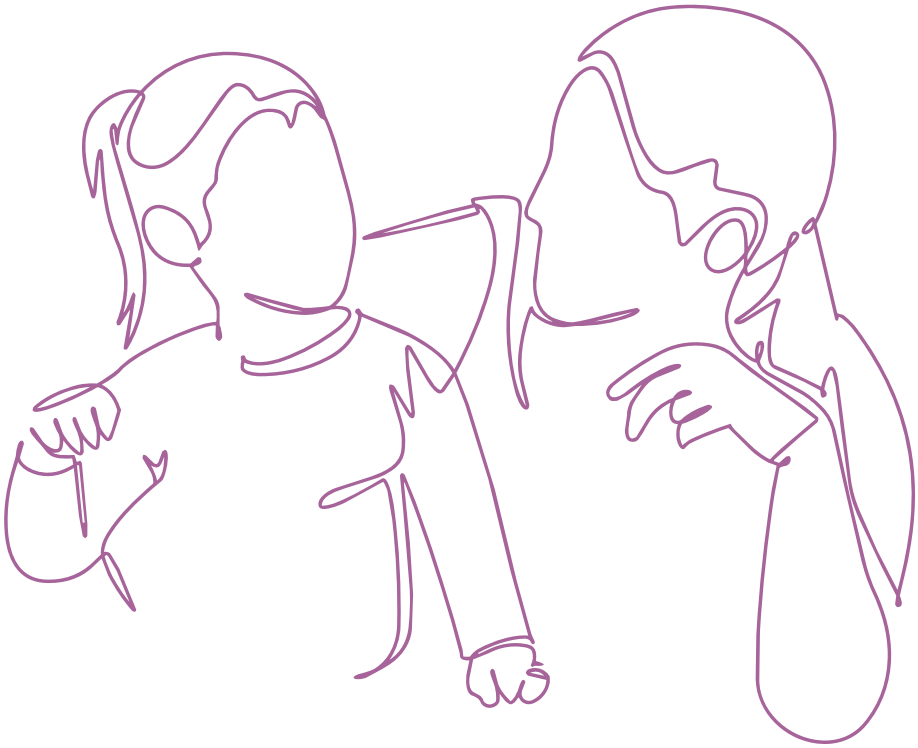


TABLE 6: *Overlay elements*

Adapted/individualised mealtimes

Inclusive, child-centred mealtime experiences tailored to each child's developmental, sensory, medical and dietary needs. Educators co-design with families/allied health and provide reasonable adjustments, e.g., seated/quiet spaces, texture or utensil/adaptive equipment, visual/AAC supports, food allergy/dysphagia plans, and gentle prompting without pressure – so every child can participate safely and with dignity (through eating, or by alternative engagement such as seeing, smelling, or helping).

Characteristics

- **Planning:** developed with families/allied health; clear diet prescriptions for children with special dietary needs (dysphagia/individual allergy care plans/texture modification, etc.) documentation.
- **Environment:** small/quiet space; predictable routine; visual schedule; consistent educator for co-regulation.
- **Serving/equipment:** adaptive utensils, seating, textures; paced feeding supports; seated-only eating.
- **Participation:** multiple pathways (eating or alternative engagement – seeing, smelling, helping); no pressure.
- **Communication:** AAC/visual supports embedded; wait time; affirmation of preferences/cues.
- **Inclusion:** brief peer/buddy options or parallel dining to maintain social connection; regular review.

Pros & cons

Pros

- Safety and dignity for children with medical, sensory or developmental needs.
- Participation pathways beyond eating (seeing/smelling/helping).
- Reduced distress; better self-regulation and trust.
- Skills develop at the child's pace with tailored supports.
- Stronger partnership with families/allied health.

Cons

- Higher staffing/time load; scheduling complexity.
- Risk of isolation if not intentionally connected to peers.
- Extra preparation (textures, adaptive equipment).
- Dependence on specific staff if plans aren't well documented.
- Requires ongoing review and consistent implementation.

Additional food safety & food allergy management

- Ensure processes are in place to ensure the right food and drink is given to the right child. This includes systems that begin in the kitchen.
- When meals are delivered to the eating space allergy meals should be handed to the educator (using the sign out form for allergies and special dietary needs).
- Only the educator (or other assigned staff) should then identify the child with allergies, and double check that they are giving the right food or drink.
- Children should be supervised when eating to ensure they are not coming into contact with allergens from other children's meals.
- Eating environment (table/chairs/cutlery should be cleaned and checked). Spills should be cleaned up quickly.
- All children should wash their hands BEFORE and AFTER eating to reduce allergy risk.
- Use of common platters/shared bowls or buffet style dining (where children serve themselves) is not recommended for children with food allergies unless all foods are suitable for all of the children with food allergies.
- Educators should liaise with families and health care professionals (as relevant) for specific instructions related to the mealtime environment.
- For example, children with food aversions related to allergy exposure may need to only feed themselves, or only eat certain foods, with no intervention by educators.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 5

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QA1, QA2, QA3, QA4, QA5, QA6

Cultural/celebration mealtimes

Developed with children and families, these shared meals honour diverse cultural identities, traditions and values (e.g., birthdays, cultural holidays, community events). They build belonging, intercultural understanding and respect while remaining safe and inclusive (clear food allergen management and labelling, opt-in/no-pressure tasting, respectful food dialogue, and equitable, service-provided options with non-food ways to celebrate where appropriate).

Characteristics

- **Collaboration:** plan with children/families; consent around foods, stories, language and music.
- **Menu/practice:** culturally relevant options; opt-in/no-pressure tasting; food allergen management and clear labelling.
- **Equity:** service-provided or low-cost; non-food ways to celebrate (songs, dress, art).
- **Educator role:** facilitate respectful dialogue ('don't yuck my yum'); acknowledge Country where appropriate.
- **Inclusion:** seating/sensory adjustments; AAC/visuals; ensure participation without singling out.
- **Sustainability:** reusables/compost; minimise waste.

Pros & cons

Pros

- Belonging and intercultural understanding.
- Validates home identities, languages and traditions.
- Community building with families and children.
- Flexible entry points (stories, music, artefacts) beyond tasting.
- Powerful context for respectful food dialogue.

Cons

- Tokenism/stereotyping risk if not co-designed.
- Allergen/cross-contact risks rise with varied foods.
- Perceived pressure to taste; potential discomfort for some.
- Cost burden/time on families if not service-supported.
- Can crowd out routine if celebrations are too frequent.

⚠ Additional food safety & food allergy management

- This is a high risk for children with food allergies. All of the usual food allergen management procedures should be prioritised.
- Excursions – only trained educators should be responsible for providing food and supervising children with food allergies.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA3, QA4, QA5, QA6

⚠ Safe eating and choking prevention

All mealtime formats follow safe eating practices to minimise choking risk. Children are always seated while eating and actively supervised by educators who are first aid trained, including choking response.

Foods are modified to suit developmental stage: e.g., hard fruits/vegetables are softened or grated; grapes and cherry tomatoes are quartered lengthwise; and choking-risk foods like popcorn and whole nuts are not offered to children under 5. Bottles are never propped. Infants are held during feeds.

Practices are guided by current national health advice and meet or exceed regulatory expectations (e.g. National Regulations 77, 78, 85, 136, 168). These measures apply regardless of mealtime delivery mode and ensure eating is safe, supportive and respectful of each child's needs.

One-to-one/small-group mealtimes

A relationship-based mealtime with increased adult presence, where one educator sits with one child or a small group to nurture connection and self-regulation. Educators use responsive feeding (children choose whether, what and how much to eat), model non-judgemental, food-neutral eating practices, and scaffold communication and self-help at each child's pace. The routine is calm and predictable, with seating/sensory adjustments, AAC/visual supports, and clear food allergen management/safety plans. Access is planned and fair (scheduled rotations and targeted support as needed). Mealtimes are non-pressured, purposeful, and reviewed regularly.

Characteristics

- **Ratio/setting:** increased adult presence; one educator with one child or a small group; calm, predictable routine.
- **Responsive feeding:** children choose whether/what/how much; unhurried pace; right to pause/stop.
- **Targeted coaching:** communication (serve-and-return, AAC), self-help (pouring, serving, wiping) at the child's pace.
- **Safety:** allergen management/safety plans visible to the educator; seating and texture adjustments.
- **Access/fairness:** scheduled rotations and targeted support; time-limited, purposeful sessions; share insights with the team.

Pros & cons

Pros

- Deep connection; strong serve-and-return communication.
- Targeted coaching for communication and self-help.
- Calm pacing supports self-regulation and confidence.
- Helpful for infants/new enrolments and children needing extra support.
- Clear observation opportunities to inform planning with families.

Cons

- Staff time and coverage; opportunity cost for the wider group.
- Equity concerns if access isn't planned and transparent.
- Potential for over-reliance on one adult if sessions are too frequent/long.
- Can drift into monitoring/pressure without reflective practice.
- Requires careful boundaries and documentation.

⚠ Additional food safety & food allergy management

- Ensure processes are in place to ensure the right food and drink is given to the right child. This includes systems that begin in the kitchen.
- When meals are delivered to the eating space allergy meals should be handed to the educator (using the sign out form for allergies and special dietary needs).
- Only the educator (or other assigned staff) should then identify the child with allergies, and double check that they are giving the right food or drink.
- Children should be supervised when eating to ensure they are not coming into contact with allergens from other children's meals.
- Eating environment (table/chairs/cutlery should be cleaned and checked). Spills should be cleaned up quickly.
- All children should wash their hands BEFORE and AFTER eating to reduce allergy risk.
- Use of common platters/shared bowls or buffet style dining (where children serve themselves) is not recommended for children with food allergies unless all foods are suitable for all of the children with food allergies.
- Only educators trained in food allergen management should be responsible for providing food and supervising children with food allergies.
- A two-person check to ensure the right meal is given to the right child with food allergy is recommended.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
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Progressive mealtime models

Progressive mealtime models (time-windows rather than one fixed sitting) are commonly used in ECEC because they protect play flow and honour appetite cues. They also introduce supervision, hygiene and tracking challenges.

In practice, quality for progressive mealtimes is highest in smaller rooms/settings or where there are adequate staff-to-child ratios and a dedicated 'host' educator at the eating area. Clear systems (e.g., tick-off and last-call, batch serving and temperature control, food allergen management, and a defined cut-off before the next meal) help make these models safe, inclusive and equitable.

Table 7 (overpage) separates progressive breakfast, grazing station, and main mealtime models from the main mealtime models outlined in Table 5. Each model includes specific guidance on how to manage flow, ensure equity and inclusion, and meet food safety and allergen management requirements. Although the format differs, the pedagogical intent remains aligned with responsive feeding and quality adult–child engagement.

Shared foundations for all progressive mealtime models

- **Timing:** an open time window with a clear cut-off before the next meal.
- **Hosting:** a dedicated educator 'hosts' the area, greets children, keeps tone calm, and tracks participation (tick-off and last call).
- **Autonomy:** children choose if/when/how much they eat; no pressure; water is always available.
- **Safety/hygiene:** handwashing on entry and after eating; seated-only eating; utensil-only serving; batch, cover, and hold foods safely; discard perishables past safe times.
- **Inclusion:** visual/AAC prompts, sensory-aware seating, quiet options; gentle prompts so no child misses out.
- **Food allergens:** policies, protocols and procedures to ensure that children with food allergies are given the right food for them. Handwashing before and after eating for all children.
- **Learning links:** brief, authentic mealtime talk; self-help roles (serving/pouring/clearing); simple sustainability (reusables/compost).
- **Example cut-off guide for timing of mealtimes:** Breakfast closes ~30-45 min before morning tea and other food opportunities; Grazing stations close ~30-60 min before the next main meal; Main meal window runs ~45-60 min total.

TABLE 7: *Progressive Mealtime Models*

Progressive breakfast (arrival window)

Arrival-time window where breakfast is available for children who haven't eaten at home or arrive early; hosted calmly with tracking and a cut-off to protect appetite for morning tea.

Characteristics

- Open during arrival (from service opening, close 30-45 min before morning tea).
- Small rotating groups as children arrive; settling/relationship-building focus.
- Clear and clean the surfaces between arrivals to prevent allergy risks.

Pros & cons

Pros

- Supports families with early starts; warm, regulated start to the day.
- Reduces dysregulation from arriving hungry.

Cons

- Food safety challenges with long serving windows (temperature control, hygiene).
- High supervision load during busy drop-off period.
- Requires a reset of surfaces and utensils between waves of children.

Risks & mitigations

- Food safety concerns over long windows: batch/hold correctly; timestamp, cover.
- Supervision load at drop-off: assign a dedicated host; keep menu simple.
- Appetite impact if breakfast runs too close to morning tea: time cut-off required.
- Quick cleaning of spills (to reduce allergy risk)

Additional food safety & food allergy management

- Follow best practice food allergen management protocols; ensure known allergens are not on open platters; seat/serve per plans; hand-washing before and after eating (for all children).
- Two person check that the right food and drink is given to the right child with food allergy.

Progressive grazing station (morning and afternoon tea and other food opportunities)

Defined window (~45-60 min) with a supervised grazing station.

Children choose if/when/how much to eat; host tracks/tick-off and issues a last call; clear cut-off protects appetite.

Characteristics

- **Station design:** simple self-serve, small-batch replenishment, cover between groups.
- Equity prompts for children who forget/avoid eating; quick invite to quieter/engaged learners.
- Water is always freely available.

Pros & cons

Pros

- Responsive to appetite; minimal disruption to play.
- Small-group social talk; easy sustainability wins.
- Builds self-help (serving/pouring/clearing) in authentic moments.

Cons

- Children may forget or avoid meal opportunities without active tracking and reminders.
- Grazing too close to the next meal can suppress appetite.
- Requires constant hygiene management and food safety vigilance.
- Popular items may run out unequally without monitoring.
- Staffing can be stretched if a dedicated host isn't available.
- Risk of food waste if perishables aren't replenished in small batches.

Risks & mitigations

- Missed meal opportunities: tick-off + timed reminders and last call.
- Appetite dampening: set cut-off 30-60 min before the next meal.
- Hygiene/waste: utensil-only; discard time-out perishables; plan fair replenishment.
- Staffing stretch: roster a host; keep food on offer limited and repeatable.

Additional food safety & food allergy management

- Higher risk for children with allergies; needs close supervision and a two staff checking process to ensure the right food is given to the right child.
- Ensure handwashing before and after eating for all children.

Progressive mealtimes (time-window for the main meal)

Open lunch window (~45–60 min). Children choose when to eat; host supervises, tracks participation, and gently prompts to ensure equitable access, with intentional mealtime engagement.

Characteristics

- **Serving:** self-serve or educator-served in batches to keep food appealing/safe.
- **Participation equity:** monitor patterns (e.g., persistent late eaters) and coach timing.
- **Transition to school models:** occasional practice with fixed-start mini-sittings.

Pros & cons

Pros

- Strong autonomy; protects play flow; richer small-group conversations.
- Fits varied appetites/sensory needs; encourages self-monitoring and regulation.

Cons

- Some children delay or skip eating without prompts, risking hunger.
- Children graze and do not get the opportunity to feel appropriate hunger cues ahead of the next meal
- Maintaining food quality, temperature, and appeal over time is challenging.
- Requires more complex supervision across play and meal areas.
- Documentation of intake can be inconsistent without clear systems.

Risks & mitigations

- Use tracking and gentle prompts to ensure all children eat.
- Batch-serve or reheat food to maintain safe temps and appeal.
- Assign a host to manage food area while others supervise play.
- Practice fixed-time mealtimes occasionally to prepare children for school.

Additional food safety & food allergy management

- Pre-plate meals for children with food allergies that are labelled with the child's name and their allergy. Ensure clean utensils; Two staff double-check that the right meal is given to the right child.
- Seat children with food allergies according to plan; supervise during eating.
- Use dedicated utensils and do not offer share plates if anyone is consuming that child's food allergen at the meal.
- Ensure handwashing before and after eating for all children.
- Wipe down all surfaces thoroughly, including rapid cleanup of food spills.

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Outcome 1, Outcome 2, Outcome 3, Outcome 4, Outcome 5

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
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Safe eating and choking prevention

All mealtime formats follow safe eating practices to minimise choking risk. Children are always seated while eating and actively supervised by educators who are first aid trained, including choking response.

Foods are modified to suit developmental stage: e.g., hard fruits/vegetables are softened or grated; grapes and cherry tomatoes are quartered lengthwise; and choking-risk foods like popcorn and whole nuts are not offered to children under 5. Bottles are never propped. Infants are held during feeds.

Practices are guided by current national health advice and meet or exceed regulatory expectations (e.g. National Regulations 77, 78, 85, 136, 168). These measures apply regardless of mealtime delivery mode and ensure eating is safe, supportive and respectful of each child's needs.