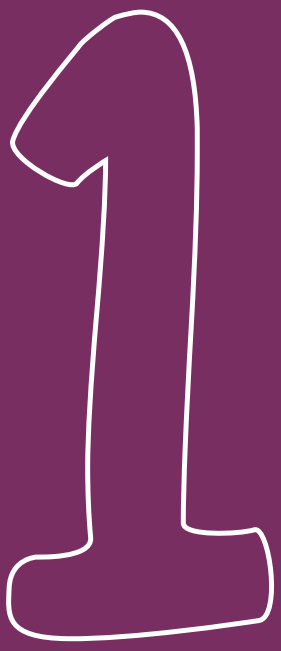
SECTION 1

Communication with Families around Mealtimes, Meals and Menus



RESEARCH

What we know about communication with families when it comes to food environments

Research conducted by the BPG Project Team found that family and staff communication was essential in building strong and trusting relationships between the centre and families. Open, two-way communication, using a variety of communication methods, was seen as key to creating the best possible environment for the children in care, and promote continuity of care between the home and the ECEC service.

How families and staff communicate, and what works well

The research found that staff and families communicate in various ways, including:

- Face-to-face conversations
- Apps
- Emails
- Newsletters
- Phone calls
- Text messages
- Via surveys
- Written forms
- Social media

Both families and staff reported that face-to-face conversations were the preference, but families also appreciated when services offered a variety of communication methods to suit their needs. Families reported that although apps were convenient, sometimes information about amount of food eaten was not clear as it was presented in vague terms with little reference for actual portions consumed (e.g. small, medium, large portion; all, half, none).

Families and staff appreciated when communication was open both ways, regardless of method. Services providing opportunities for families to provide feedback, being open to feedback from families, and taking this feedback on board in their processes, programs, menus, etc, was also mentioned as a way to build and strengthen relationships and trust. This was seen to ensure greater continuity of care between the home and the service.

Families reported that they generally felt comfortable speaking with ECEC staff about their child's food needs. That said, when they had a suggestion or request about food for their child, some families were less sure how it would be received, and at times chose not to raise it.

What do families communicate about?

In relation to the food environment and their child's feeding and eating:

- Families mainly spoke with educators about their child's food intake or food dislikes.
- Topics were largely surface level – what and how much the child had eaten that day.
- Staff found that most families were just happy their child was eating vegetables and was well-fed in care.
- Families occasionally spoke with cooks to ask for recipes or what was on the menu.
- Cooks reported not having much interaction with families and children but said they would like to be more involved to build relationships, feel less isolated from families and share nutrition knowledge.
- Service leaders found that the extent of food conversations with families really depended on the family and how involved they wanted to be.

When feeding concerns or issues arose

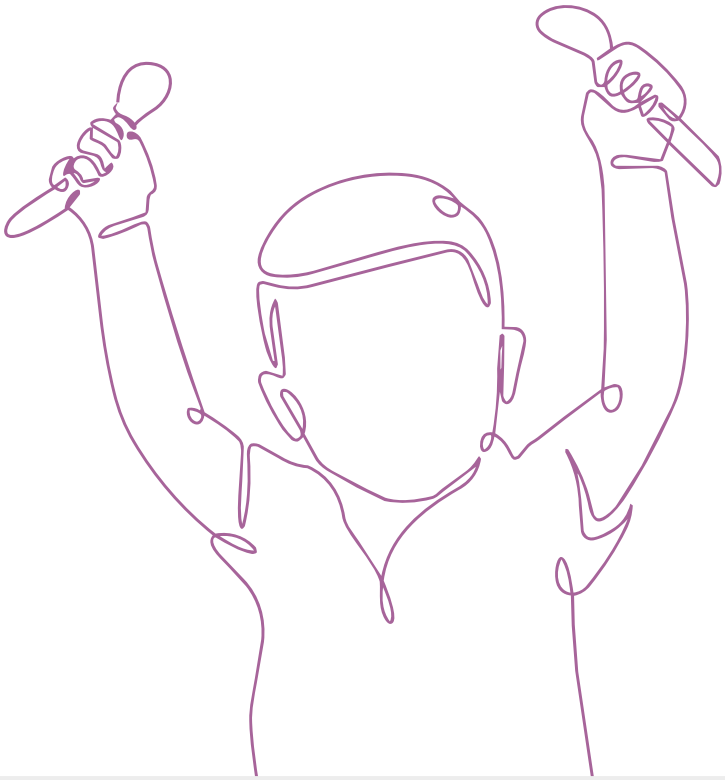
- Families mainly spoke with the service leaders who would then pass the message on to the educators and cooks.
- Staff had clear processes in place if they noticed a child was experiencing challenges with feeding, such as:
  - Having open communication, and meeting with families directly.
  - At many services, staff would recommend the family see their child health nurse or General Practitioner (GP) to decide on next steps for support.
  - However, some services had ties to local allied health professionals, and could facilitate a link with the family (after gaining family consent to do so).
- Staff reported being open to making adjustments for the child if needed, and working with the allied health professionals to create plans and learn how to support the child in the best way possible.

What are some of the challenges?

- Family engagement with the centre. Staff reported the following:
  - Limited time to have discussions with families as:
    - > Families are busy.
    - > Drop off and pickup times are often rushed.
    - > Staff are supervising children and cannot leave to have discussions with families.
  - Having to cancel family sessions due to lack of interest or time to attend.
- Families reported the following:
  - Food-related conversations were initiated during enrolment, demonstrating there was an early focus on understanding family preferences and needs.
  - Following enrolment however, these discussions were perceived to occur more on an ad hoc basis.
  - In the absence of regular opportunities for dialogue, they were occasionally hesitant to raise food-related topics and perceived these conversations as being met with varying levels of openness.
- Lack of policy around staff and family engagement.
  - All staff and families reported not having, or being unaware of, policy regarding conversations with families around children's feeding and eating.
  - This is a gap that highly individualised and contextually appropriate policy could fill and enhance communication around food at the service or coming in from home, and children's changing needs as they grow.
- ECEC service menus not matching what was being served to the children.
- Lack of communication from staff to families about their child's day
  - Families found that the amount of information given varied depending on which staff member was present at pickup, and they did not always have much information to provide families

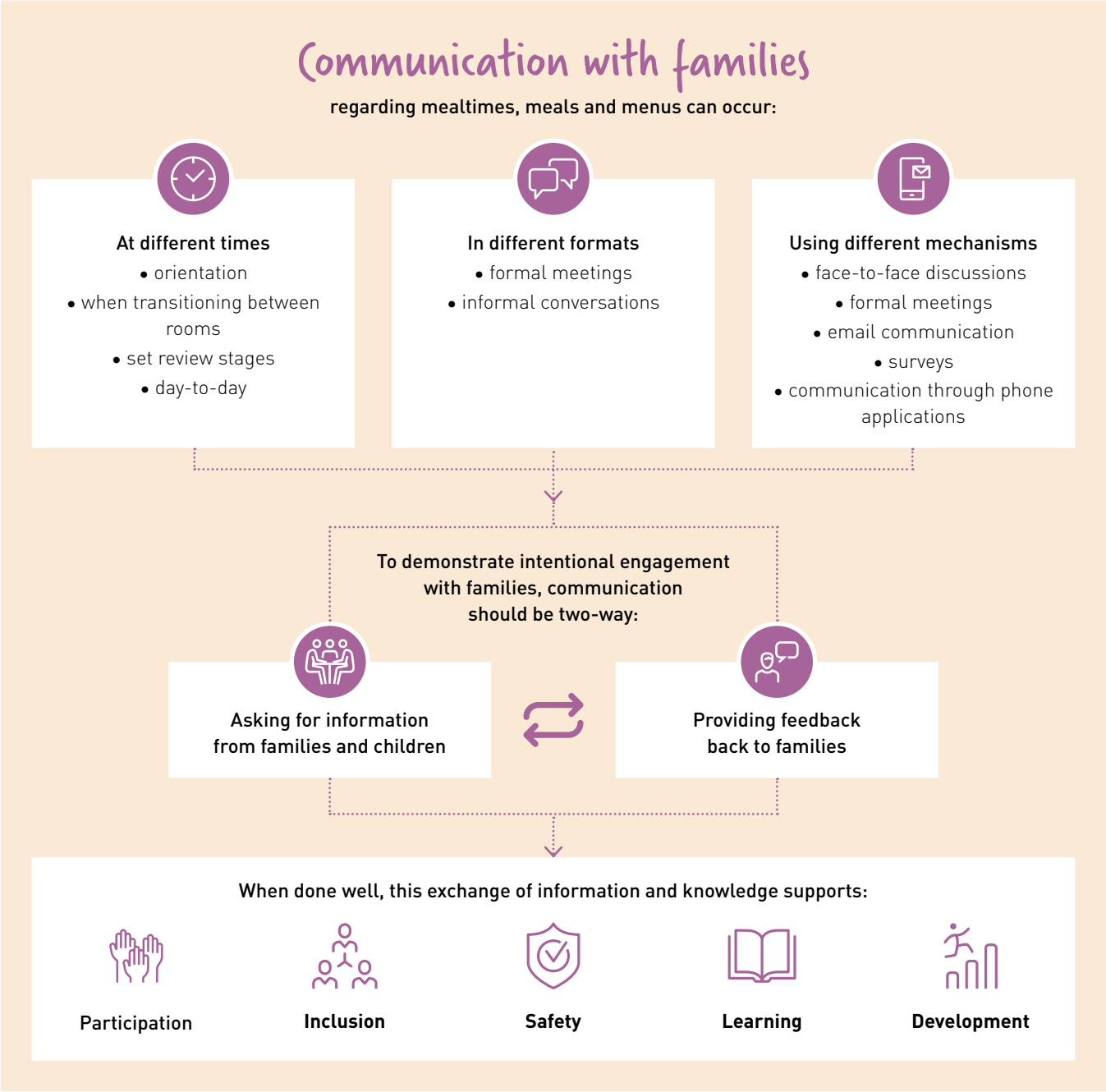
Overcoming these challenges

- Development of policy, using best practice guidance, to improve the quality and quantity of staff and family engagement.
- Invite families to participate.
  - Families reported that they were more likely to be involved if invited as they may not know how or when to get involved.
- Continued work of building communication and strengthening relationships between staff and families so that ECEC services are aware of what families need, and so that families feel confident to share their needs with services.



Communicating with families

The 'Communicating with families' section outlines what types of information and knowledge can be exchanged with regards to mealtimes, meals and menus and how this detail can be used. However, to begin it is important to consider what information is actually needed as well as how and when communication occurs and acting on the information received.



The case study Turtle Cove Wandina Early Learning Centre provides an example of one services approach to communication with families. *See Case study, page 28 of this module*

What information is actually needed, how and when we collect it and ensuring we use it

Services and educators need to be clear about what information is actually needed, considering the precise purpose of each aspect of the information gathered. The aim is to understand what will keep this child safe, respected, and included and to ensure that families feel supported rather than exposed. This means gathering only what information is needed, then acting on it.

Before asking a family for information, staff might pause and consider:

- *Why do I need to know this?*
- *How will this information improve the child's safety, participation, dignity, or belonging?*
- *Who will have access to it?*
- *Have I explained why I am asking?*
- *Could I ask this in a less intrusive way?*
- *What will I do with what the family tells me?*

The above questions can become a practical guidance prompt – e.g. what do we need to know, why do we need to know it, who needs access to it, and how will it change what we do?

Perhaps especially important because food is personal (culture, poverty, body image, medical histories, disability, parenting judgement, family stress, sensory experience, religion, trauma, and identity). A question that seems simple to a professional may feel loaded to a family. For example "What does your child eat at home?" can be supportive, but it can also feel like surveillance or a potential place for judgement.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA2, QA6



VIGNETTE 1

Asking only what we need, then acting on it

During enrolment, Sofia's grandmother mentions that Sofia has recently become anxious around food after a choking incident at home. The enrolment form asks several broad questions about food routines, medical history and family circumstances. A staff member begins asking Sofia's grandmother about the choking incident in the hallway while other families are nearby. Sofia's grandmother becomes quiet and says, "Maybe I should talk to her mum first."

Response

Food conversations can feel exposing, especially when families have past experiences of judgement, worry or stress. Inclusive engagement requires services to ask with purpose, privacy and care. Staff should explain why information is needed, gather only what will support Sofia's safety, participation, dignity and belonging, and make clear how the information will be used.

A supportive response might be: "Thank you for telling us. We do not need to discuss details here. Would you prefer a private time with the room leader so we can understand what helps Sofia feel safe at mealtimes and what you would like staff to know?" The conversation can focus on practical supports: signs that Sofia is anxious, foods or textures to avoid until further advice is given, calming strategies, who to contact, and whether any medical or allied-health advice is needed.

The information should then change practice. Staff might plan a predictable seat, avoid pressuring Sofia to taste, use calm language, monitor distress cues and provide family feedback on safety, comfort and participation.

Reflective questions

- *Why are we asking this question, and how will the answer change what we do?*
- *Are we gathering information in a way that makes families feel supported rather than exposed?*
- *How do we ensure important information is shared with the right staff while respecting privacy?*

Communication regarding mealtimes – questions and feedback

Each service is unique

Of the questions listed below, not all will apply to every service. Therefore, when taking inspiration from this section, select what is relevant to your ECEC service and broader community. This includes acknowledging how cultural practices can influence eating and mealtimes, and understanding the priorities of families within the service.

General points

- Use open questions, provide prompts to initiate engagement/communication.
- Remain non judgemental.
- Gather necessary information that is actionable only.
- Focus on the child feeling included, safe (referring to physical, emotional, and cultural safety), supporting participation and maintaining dignity and agency.
- Different questions will be needed depending on the age group.
- Frame questions around support that can be provided, including limiting what is in scope for a service and what would be referred out or discussed. This could include supporting skills, experiences, familiarity with different foods, etc.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA5, QA6



VIGNETTE 2

Responding to family perspectives

If a family came to your service whose child was fed by hand or by a spoon when your service generally encourages child agency in feeding, how would you respond?

- Using the family's preferred feeding method gives them confidence that we are on the same page.
- Our service would try to maintain the feeding method families were already using at home.
  - After the child had been at the centre for a while, we would discuss feeding again with the family.
  - In agreement with the family, we would introduce the method that we use at our service. If the family would prefer not to do this, we would follow their wishes.
- We would also ask whether the family felt comfortable explaining their eating practices so we could share them with other children who might be interested.

How would you support that conversation?

The big thing during a conversation with a family member is to:

- Let them know we really want to know what they're talking about.
- Listen attentively and ask questions to understand and support the child in the best way possible.
- Create a safe environment – not only for the child, but for the family as well.

The best way to support the conversation is to provide families with different tools to interact with the centre, like:

- Giving them the chance to share their children's habits in a format they feel comfortable with.
- Some families may prefer to talk, while others may prefer to write an email or use an app.

How would you approach the family to transition to what the service does while respecting what the family does?

Children often learn from each other through their natural social interactions throughout the day. This transition occurs by following the children's interests and providing opportunities to explore one another's beliefs.

Why do we ask questions?

- Understand mealtime structure at home to support transition.
- Learn about food preferences and any concerns around particular foods.
- Understand stage of solid food introduction.
- Learn about any special dietary needs.
- Understand the family's goals, expectations and child's development.
- Build partnerships with families, recognising their knowledge and expertise.
- Understand the child's individual appetite, eating patterns, independence and developmental stage.
- Plan responsive environments, routines, and intentional teaching experiences around food.
- Ensure mealtimes remain child centred, inclusive and evidence informed.
- Learn about potential challenges or food-related trauma.

Reflective questions

- *Are there different questions dependent on age group?*
- *Do the questions provide meaningful information for educators to use to inform responsive mealtime practices and individual support?*
- *Do the questions support culturally responsive and inclusive practice, acknowledging each family's values, traditions and meal routines?*
- *Will the information gathered help strengthen continuity of learning between home and the education and care setting?*

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

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA2, QA5, QA6

Questions ECEC services can ask to support mealtimes

Children's appetites often vary from day to day. Have you noticed any patterns?

REASONING

- Appetite is a biological process and shifts day to day in response to growth, sleep and activity and development.
- Understanding patterns helps educators respond appropriately rather than expecting children to eat similar amounts each day.

ACTION

- Monitor any significant changes in appetite. Record food intake across meals and share this information with the family.
- Adjust meal expectations, meal routines and educator responses.
- Monitor patterns over time and support children to recognise and respond to their hunger and 'had enough' cues.

Are there strategies you implement at home to support mealtimes that you find helpful?

REASONING

- Seating, eating utensils and table settings can impact comfort and interest in engaging at mealtimes.
- Families are the children's first teachers and know their child best. When educators understand which strategies are successful at home, continuity is promoted across home and the service, all while respecting family practices.

ACTION

- Where appropriate, incorporate successful family strategies into the daily mealtime practices to provide continuity and reduce stress.

Are there some signs your child gives when they are hungry or have 'had enough'?
For babies and non-speaking children: does your child know sign language/baby sign language?

REASONING

- Babies and non-speaking children will indicate their hunger and 'had enough' signals in various ways and older children may communicate in a different language.
- Recognising these signs supports responsive feeding and helps children recognise body awareness.

→

ACTION

- Note individual hunger and 'had enough' cues among non-speaking children and ensure educators are made aware.
- Respond consistently to the cues and avoid pressure to eat.
- Support the children to trust and regulate their own appetite.

Are there any food experiences that you would like us to try? e.g. cooking, cultural celebrations, sensory explorations

REASONING

- Food experiences support learning, identity and cultural inclusion. They embrace curiosity and confidence around food beyond just eating.
- Asking for food experience ideas creates an opportunity to invite families to collaborate and be actively involved.

→

ACTION

- Incorporate family suggestions into the daily curriculum.
- Include families and children in menu planning.
- Invite families to take part or engage in food experiences that may involve sharing their culture.

How often does your baby show they need a feed? How much do you usually offer them? Are there any feeds that they take better than others? Are there any particular feeding routines that we need to be aware of?

REASONING

- Understanding a baby's usual intake helps educators maintain consistent feeding routines.

→

ACTION

- Plan the child's bottle feeds based on the child's current schedule from home to promote consistency with established routine, while remaining responsive to developmental needs and change in appetite.

Is there anything about what mealtimes often look like at home that you think would be helpful for us to know?

REASONING

- Understanding broader mealtime environments provides educators with context about family routines, expectations, and relationships with mealtimes. It also shows respect for family rituals and offers a sense of belonging.

→

ACTION

- Use this information to establish continuity between home and the ECEC service, personalise the educator responses and communicate with families regarding children's mealtime experiences.

How is your child going with self-feeding? e.g. can they hold a spoon etc.?
How does your child usually drink? e.g. do they have experience with an open cup?

REASONING

- Families may have different goals, expectations, and priorities in regards to self-feeding. Working with families helps educators understand these goals and expectations and maintains a supportive and respectful partnership.

See Vignette 2, page 20 of this module
See Vignette 5, page 61 of this module

- Self-feeding reflects the child's growing independence, coordination and confidence in eating. Every child develops at their own pace.

ACTION

- Work with families to develop consistent approaches and intentional opportunities for children to practice and develop self-help skills.
- Offer opportunities to practice self-feeding with an understanding of baseline level to start from.
- Provide age appropriate utensils, opportunities and encouragement that match the child's current developmental stage while supporting independence.

Food is a challenging area for many of us. Have you noticed any challenges for your child around food or mealtimes in the past? e.g. difficulties self-feeding, distractions, etc

REASONING

- Children can have varying challenges around food for many different reasons. These may be due to negative past experiences, sensory processing differences, oral-motor difficulties or other developmental differences.
- Early identification of challenges during mealtimes enables the educators to respond proactively and implement supportive strategies that can help reduce stress for children and families.

ACTION

- Provide supportive feeding experiences that respect sensory preferences, reduce mealtime stress and support positive mealtimes.
- Monitor ongoing feeding difficulties and share observations about eating patterns and progress.
- Adapt the mealtime environment, routines and educator interactions where appropriate. This may include allowing the child to eat in a space where they feel safe.
- Work collaboratively with families and, if needed, relevant professionals if additional support is required.

Are there any cultural practices, routines or rituals in your home that you would like us to continue at the service?

REASONING

- Including varied cultural food practices can offer a sense of belonging, connection, identity and cultural responsiveness.
- Demonstrates respect for family traditions and supports inclusion.

ACTION

- Celebrate diversity and promote inclusion by including different cultural practices at mealtimes and in food related celebrations.
- Embed family practices into mealtimes where possible.
- Ensure mealtimes are culturally safe, inclusive and meaningful.

Ongoing feedback

- **For ongoing conversations –** consider asking families for feedback on mealtime practices in the service.
- **Seek feedback from families when making adaptions to mealtimes –** work in partnership, set goals with families for continuity across care environments, guided by resources/research.

See Menu and Meal Quality, Section 7, page 76

Feedback to families on mealtimes

Each family is unique

Providing feedback to families is sensitive, and requires a strong relationship between educators and family members. All information in this section should be adapted to suit the community at your service, and the relationship each educator has with each family.

General points

- Consider using a 'sandwich' approach for difficult or complex feedback. For example, start with something positive, then raise the concerns, then end with a different positive statement.
- When communicating with families, impart confidence that you know their child, or that you would like to get to know them more.
- Ask families directly how they would like to communicate, including but not limited to:
  - A quiet space at the service to speak in person.
  - A private phone conversation.
  - Via an app (including group notes or daily diaries).
- All feedback should be provided with family sensitivity in mind, particularly when discussing behaviours that may be perceived as being out of the ordinary.
- Follow up the conversation with an email reiterating what was discussed, asking the family to confirm that the information is correct and aligns with their goals, expectations, and is culturally appropriate.

Why do we provide feedback?

- Understand mealtime structure at home to support transition.
- Support families by sharing strategies educators have used to overcome mealtime challenges in the service.

Reflective questions

- *Is the feedback necessary, supportive, or helpful for families?*
- *Is the feedback urgent, or is there a more appropriate opportunity in the future to raise this with the family?*
- *Does feedback to families about children's mealtimes reflect ongoing observations and patterns in the child's eating experiences, rather than a one-off observation?*

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA6

Feedback points

Adaptions to meals based on cultural requirement, language and cues; and how educators are responding to those requirements

REASONING

- Demonstrates respect for each child's identity, culture and family values while strengthening families' confidence that their child's needs are understood and respected.

→

APPLICATION

- Embed culturally responsive practices, individual routines and responsive feeding approaches that reflect each child's home experiences where possible.

- *Patterns observed during mealtimes – perhaps if a child has expressed that they did not want a meal*
- *Acknowledging low/no food intake and raising this with family, then inviting a discussion on reasons why and work on strategies together*
- *Food insecurity (e.g. noticing that the child regularly seems hungry after eating all of the food in their lunchbox, or regularly arrives after breakfast is provided without having eaten)*

REASONING

- Children can eat and engage with food differently whilst in care compared to when at home. This can include either positive or negative interactions with food.
- Sharing patterns and observations helps families and educators collaborate and develop a shared understanding of the child's eating behaviour over time. It also helps recognise that a child's appetite can naturally vary due to growth, illness, environment, sleep, activity or other factors.
- If a family is experiencing food insecurity, this can affect the child's health, wellbeing, participation in mealtimes and learning.

→

APPLICATION

- Sharing this information with families and understanding differences in the home and care environment can help both parties to agree on shared strategies that best support positive food experiences.
- Are there any triggers, or certain events or foods that influence the mealtime?
- Discuss observations with families, identify consistent patterns, and collaboratively adapt routines or mealtime practices where appropriate to support the child's wellbeing.
- Have sensitive conversations with families regarding food insecurity to discuss whether professional support may be needed. The ECEC service can then assist families to access additional support if required. *See Section 4, page 57*

If a child at a lunchbox service was interested in other children's food. This could be communicated to families e.g. your child was interested in x food (as information – noting the children did not share the food)

REASONING

- Children can show curiosity around food, and this may include food that other children are eating – especially within lunchbox services.
- Noting a child's curiosity about other food shows that educators are carefully observing children's interests and allows for the possible expansion of a child's palette and range of foods they may accept both at home and at the ECEC service.

→

APPLICATION

- Use food diaries/support plans for children that outlines accepted foods, new foods tried, success of trialling, etc. This can incorporate a channel for communication that can be used during verbal hand overs.

Feedback on diverse mealtime behaviour – needs to be delivered with sensitivity, and consideration of duration of the behaviours

REASONING

- The way children approach food and mealtimes can vary from day-to-day, and looks different for each child.
- If educators are concerned about specific behaviours exhibited at mealtimes, sharing this with families can provide them with a greater understanding of their child and whether further action needs to be taken.

APPLICATION

- If the family is concerned about their child's particular mealtime behaviours, it may be helpful for them to seek external advice from a health professional.

See Section 3, page 39

Communication regarding mealtime skill development

REASONING

- Feedback or concerns in terms of age-appropriate feeding skills can be shared with families and used to identify whether a child may need additional support around feeding and mealtimes.

APPLICATION

- Use verbal communication or the service's app (if they have one) to communicate mealtime skill development with families.

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK
Outcome 1, Outcome 3

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD
QA1, QA6



VIGNETTE 3

Day-to-day communication that values participation

At pickup, educators tell Luca's father, "He didn't eat much lunch again." Luca is four, Autistic and often participates in meals by sitting near a trusted educator, smelling food from a distance and eating a familiar item from his lunchbox. His father looks worried and says, "So it was another bad day?" The educator realises that the feedback has focused only on consumption and has missed Luca's progress in participation and regulation.

Response

Day-to-day communication shapes how families understand their child's experiences and how much trust they feel in the service. For some children, participation is a significant achievement even when little food is eaten. This does not mean ignoring nutrition or safety concerns; it means giving families a fuller and more respectful picture of the child's day.

A more inclusive update might be: "Luca ate six of his familiar crackers and sat with the group for about ten minutes today. He smelled the pasta from his seat and we had a peaceful mealtime. When the room became very noisy, Luca chose to move to the quieter table before everyone came back for the story. We noticed he seems more comfortable knowing he has these choices."

If there are concerns about intake, staff can discuss them carefully and in line with service procedures. However, routine feedback should also recognise autonomy, cues, sensory comfort, peer connection and the strategies that support belonging.

Reflective questions

- *What do we usually report to families: intake only, or participation, comfort, cues and connection?*
- *How do we describe children's progress without pressuring them or worrying families unnecessarily?*
- *What patterns from daily feedback should be used to adjust the environment or routine?*

Communication regarding meals and menus

Much of the information in this module relating to communication with families about mealtimes also relates to communication about the menu and meals themselves. However, communication with families about the menu is also regulated in the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012, and is therefore crucial to understand and implement.

By communicating with families about the menu, services can understand and plan for the dietary needs of each child. This includes meeting their specific dietary requirements to ensure physical safety, but it also improves emotional safety by providing foods appropriate to a child's culture or preferences, and strengthens the sense of community at the service by allowing families to feel their voice has an impact.

Below is a list of regulations and recommendations regarding menu and meal communication with families, alongside strategies to support this and sections of the Best Practice Guide with more detailed information.

TABLE 2: *Regulations and recommendations regarding menu and meal communication with families*

Regulations	Strategies
Regulation 79. Service providing food and beverages	Although much of this information can be gathered at enrolment, children's preferences change rapidly. Engage with families regularly to understand if dietary requirements have changed.
Regulation 80. Weekly menu	Notify families if a change is made to the menu.

Recommendations	Strategies
Provide families with daily information about the child's food intake and experience	If the number of portions is provided (e.g. 3 serves pumpkin soup), ensure families have a clear understanding of what a 'serve' looks like to provide context. Consider providing information about a child's experience with food, not only their intake. For example, 'Sam was confidently using his fork to eat pieces of beef today'.
Gather feedback from families about their child's dietary preferences and requirements	This can be done formally (e.g. a short survey) or informally (e.g. a menu suggestion box near the front door). Consider requesting recipes children enjoy at home, or ideas families would like to trial.

CASE STUDY

Communication with families

Feedback: mechanisms, review and embedding into practice

SERVICE	Turtle Cove Wandina Early Learning Centre
SERVICE TYPE	Long day care
MEAL PROVISION MODEL	All meals provided on-site
BUSINESS MODEL	Private, for-profit
AGE RANGE	3 months to 4 years
NUMBER OF APPROVED PLACES	59
NUMBER OF STAFF	30
REMOTENESS AREA CLASSIFICATION	Outer regional

LOCATION

Wandina, WA



Background

Turtle Cove Wandina prioritises open communications with families at their service. There are formal moments for communication embedded in their processes, as well as opportunities for those informal, ad hoc conversations that happen throughout the day.

How do you approach feedback to families in your service?

- Feedback is central to our service approach of holistic care.
- Our goal is not only to care for the child, but to care for families as partners in their child's learning and wellbeing journey.
- In line with this, we have embedded practices for seeking feedback about our service so that families feel included, supported, and genuinely valued within our community.

How do you identify areas of feedback?

- We use monthly group observations and identified trends within the learning environment to develop service-wide feedback initiatives.
- When families or educators identify a common area of development, interest, or need across a group of children, we provide:
  - Targeted feedback and information to families
  - This promotes consistency between home and the service

An example

If educators are supporting children to develop independence skills such as using utensils at mealtimes, we may share the following with all families within that age group, based on group observations and reflective practice:

- Observations
- Strategies
- Practical suggestions
- Information relating to:
  - Language development
  - Social skills
  - Sleep routines
  - Self-help skills
  - Wellbeing initiatives

These initiatives strengthen partnerships with families by sharing common goals, promoting consistent approaches, and supporting children's development across both the home and early learning environments.

What mechanisms and approaches do you use (both formal and informal)?

We encourage families to share their perspectives, ideas, concerns, and aspirations for their children, recognising that they are their child's first and most important teachers.

We actively seek family feedback through:

- Formal surveys
- Informal conversations
- Our enrolment and orientation discussions
- Family meetings
- Suggestion opportunities
- Daily communication with educators

We also seek feedback on the following to ensure our practices remain responsive to the needs of our community:

- Specific initiatives
- Events
- Environments
- Service changes

How often do you provide feedback?

- We seek feedback from families through both formal and informal processes that are embedded into our everyday practice.
- By embedding ongoing feedback opportunities, we ensure family perspectives continuously inform decision-making, service improvement, and children's learning experiences.

Informal feedback

- Encouraged daily through conversations at drop-off and pick-up
- Phone calls
- Emails
- Digital communication platform (app)

Formal feedback

- Opportunities provided at least annually through family surveys
- At enrolment
- At orientation
- During transition periods
- At family meetings
- Additional feedback sought following:
  - Significant events
  - Service changes
  - Policy reviews
  - Environment updates
  - New initiatives

How do you review feedback?

Feedback received is reviewed by the leadership team and educators:

- Actions are communicated back to families where appropriate
- This allows family voices to be heard and to influence:
  - Decision-making
  - Service improvements
  - Program development
  - Policy review

How often do you provide feedback beyond orientation?

Feedback is provided to families on an ongoing basis throughout their child's enrolment, rather than only at orientation.

Educators share information daily through:

- Daily conversations
- Learning updates through announcements
- Daily group journal
- Child comments
- Observations and photographs on a mobile communications app.

In addition to daily communication, more focused feedback is provided at key points throughout the year, including:

- When creating and completing observations and developmental assessments.
- During transitions between rooms.
- When educators identify emerging interests, strengths, or areas requiring additional support.
- Following significant milestones or achievements.
- During family meetings, when developing support plans and goal-setting discussions.
- When implementing group initiatives or focus areas across a room.
- Following incidents, injuries, illnesses, or wellbeing concerns.
- During policy reviews, service changes, or quality improvement initiatives where family input is sought.

What are some of the points that are raised during discussions with your team about how often you should provide feedback to families?

Some of the key points raised during these conversations include:

- Ensuring every family receives regular and equitable feedback about their child's learning, development, and wellbeing.
- Finding the balance between the quantity and quality of feedback
  - Ensuring updates are meaningful rather than simply frequent.
- Identifying families who may benefit from more personalised communication or additional support.
- Discussing the most effective methods of communication for different families, including:
  - Face-to-face conversations
  - Digital platforms
  - Phone calls
  - Meetings.
- Reflecting on whether feedback is linked to children's learning outcomes, developmental progress, and individual goals.
- Considering how children's voices and perspectives are represented within feedback shared with families.
- Reviewing family engagement with feedback and exploring strategies to encourage two-way communication.
- Ensuring feedback celebrates children's strengths and achievements while also addressing areas where support may be beneficial.
- Discussing feedback opportunities during key transition periods, significant milestones, or changes in a child's circumstances.
- Reflecting on family feedback and whether current communication practices are meeting the needs and expectations of our community.

These discussions form part of our ongoing reflective practice and commitment to continuous improvement, ensuring our communication with families remains purposeful, collaborative, and centred on positive outcomes for children.

How do you provide specialised feedback, for example if it relates to a support plan?

Specialised feedback is:

- Tailored to the individual child and family
- Provided in a way that respects confidentiality, collaboration, and family preferences.

While the approach may vary depending on each family's needs and circumstances, specialised feedback is routinely shared through scheduled meetings with members of our leadership and educational teams. These meetings provide an opportunity to:

- Discuss progress against goals
- Review strategies outlined within support plans
- Share observations and documentation
- Celebrate achievements
- Collaboratively identify next steps

Families are encouraged to contribute their insights, ask questions, and participate in decision-making to ensure a consistent and holistic approach across home and the service.

Where appropriate, specialised feedback may also be supported through the following methods, ensuring all interest holders are informed and working towards shared outcomes for the child:

- Written summaries
- Communication books
- Emails
- Phone calls
- Collaboration with external professionals

Example of feedback in practice

During reflective discussions, educators identified that many children across the Clownfish Room (3–5 years) were showing an interest in food preparation and developing independence at mealtimes.

Through conversations, observations, and children's choices during play, educators noted that children were frequently pretending to cook, discussing foods they ate at home, and expressing preferences about meals.

Group feedback Initiative

The team decided to implement a mealtime focus centred on:

- Using utensils independently
- Serving themselves appropriate portions
- Participating in cooking experiences
- Developing positive mealtime conversations

The initiative was guided by children's voices. Educators asked children:

- "What foods do you like helping to make?"
- "What would you like to cook?"
- "What foods do you eat with your family?"
- "How do you know when your tummy has 'had enough'?"

Children's responses informed:

- Cooking experiences
- Menu discussions
- Mealtime practices
  - For example, children requested smoothies, vegetable muffins, and homemade pizzas, which were incorporated into the menu.

A group communication was shared with families that included:

- An explanation of the focus, highlighting children's interests and ideas
- Practical suggestions they could try at home, such as:
  - Involving children in meal preparation
  - Offering child-sized utensils
  - Encouraging opportunities for children self-serving their food

Ongoing feedback to families

Throughout the term, educators provided regular feedback through:

- Daily conversations at pick-up
- Learning stories documenting cooking experiences
- Photographs of children preparing fruit platters and baking muffins
- Weekly updates highlighting children's progress and engagement

Examples of feedback included:

- "Today Ava independently used tongs to serve herself fruit at afternoon tea. She proudly told educators she helps make fruit salad with her grandmother at home and wanted to show her friends how she does it."

Team discussions about feedback

During team meetings, educators reflected on:

- Whether all families were receiving meaningful mealtime feedback
- How often updates should be shared
- Which children may benefit from more targeted feedback
- How children's perspectives and ideas were being captured and communicated to families
- Strategies for ensuring children's voices informed future food and cooking experiences

The team agreed that feedback should not only focus on what children were eating but also on:

- Ideas, choices, preferences, and decision-making children demonstrated during mealtimes
- Increased verbal feedback around mealtimes due to strong family interest in children's eating habits.

Seeking family feedback

Midway through the initiative, families were invited to share feedback through a short survey and informal conversations. Questions included:

- Have you noticed any changes in your child's independence at mealtimes?
- Has your child shown increased interest in helping prepare food at home?
- Are there any mealtime goals you would like us to support?

Several families reported that their children had begun helping to set the table and requesting opportunities to prepare food at home.

Specialised feedback example (support plan)

One child had a support plan goal related to expanding their range of accepted foods and reducing anxiety around trying new foods.

- A meeting was held with the family, Room Leader and Nominated Supervisor.
- During the meeting, educators shared:
  - Observations of the child's participation in cooking experiences
  - Foods the child was beginning to explore through sensory play
  - Successful strategies used during mealtimes
  - Progress towards agreed goals
- Together, the support plan was reviewed and consistent approaches between home and the service were agreed on, including:
  - Involving the child in food preparation
  - Offering familiar and unfamiliar foods together
  - Celebrating small successes without pressure
- A written summary was provided following the meeting, and progress continued to be discussed during regular check-ins with the family.

As a result of the initiative, the child demonstrated increased independence, confidence, and enjoyment during mealtimes. The family reported seeing similar behaviours at home, and the service used family feedback and educator reflections to inform future cooking experiences and mealtime practices.