



Safer Eating and Weaning Policy

Created: August 2026

To be reviewed: August 2027

1. Purpose

At Little Learners, we want mealtimes to be safe, calm and enjoyable. Safer weaning is the safe introduction of solid foods from around six months, alongside breast milk or formula. It focuses on reducing choking and allergy risks, providing appropriate nutrition, supporting responsive feeding and creating a safe eating environment.

2. Before a Child Starts

Before a child starts at Little Learners, parents/carers must complete an 'All About Me' form, which includes information about the child's feeding habits, current stage of weaning, foods and textures they can manage, allergies, intolerances, dietary requirements and any feeding or medical concerns.

During the child's settling-in sessions, the Key Person will discuss the child's feeding and weaning needs with parents/carers. This ensures that we fully understand the child's individual needs and that relevant staff are aware of them. Parents/carers must inform the nursery of any changes.

Children progress through weaning at different rates, so assumptions must not be made based on age. Little Learners will work with parents/carers to ensure food and textures are suitable for each child's individual developmental stage and feeding ability.

3. Supervision During Mealtimes

Children who have not fully transitioned to solid foods must have one adult seated with them for the entire meal, with their full attention focused on that child. The adult must actively supervise, monitor how the child manages their food and respond immediately to any concerns.

For fully weaned children, an adult must be seated at the group's table for the entire meal. Staff must actively supervise, encourage safe eating and respond promptly to any concerns, including choking or allergic reactions.

Children must never be left unattended while eating.

4. Safe Eating Environment

Children must remain safely seated while eating. They must not walk, run, stand, play, climb or carry food around while eating. Babies must be securely seated upright in a suitable highchair or chair.

Staff must remain focused on the children and must not become distracted by paperwork, cleaning or unnecessary conversations. If a member of staff needs to leave the table, another suitable member of staff must take over supervision first.

Children must not share or swap food, particularly because this can create an allergy risk.

5. Checking and Preparing Food

Every child's food must be checked before it is given to them.

At every mealtime and snack time, the Room Leader will ensure that a named member of staff is responsible for checking the food provided to each child. The staff member must check that the food is suitable for the child's developmental stage, has been appropriately cut, minced, mashed or softened, is at a safe temperature and meets all allergy, dietary and medical requirements.

Midday assistants check food and packed lunch before serving it to the children.

Food must be prepared carefully to reduce choking risks. For example, grapes and cherry tomatoes must be cut lengthways and into quarters, sausages should be cut lengthways into thin strips, and hard fruit and vegetables should be softened or cooked where appropriate. Bones, stones and pips must be removed. Whole nuts must not be given to children under five, and popcorn, hard sweets, marshmallows and jelly cubes must not be provided.

If staff are unsure whether food is safe or appropriate for a child, they must not serve it until they have checked.

6. Gagging and Choking

All staff must understand the difference between gagging and choking.

Gagging can be a normal part of learning to manage different textures. A child may make noise, cough, splutter or have a red face.

Choking is an emergency. A child may be unable to cough, speak or cry, make little or no noise, have difficulty breathing or become pale or blue. Staff must respond immediately in accordance with their paediatric first aid training and Little Learners' emergency procedures.

Any choking incident requiring intervention must be recorded, reviewed and reported to the Manager and the child's parents/carers. The Manager will monitor incidents for any patterns involving particular foods or practices.

7. Allergies and Medical Care Plans

Where a child has an allergy or intolerance, Little Learners will work with parents/carers and, where appropriate, health professionals to develop an allergy action plan. Allergy and intolerance information must be kept up to date and shared with all staff who need to know. The setting may use the allergy action plan as appropriate.

All staff must be aware of the symptoms and treatment of allergic reactions and anaphylaxis, understand the difference between an allergy and an intolerance, and know what action to take in an emergency. Staff must know how to use prescribed emergency medication where applicable.

Staff must check dietary requirements before serving food, prevent cross-contamination and ensure any prescribed emergency medication is available.

All allergy and medical care plans must be followed at all times. Staff must never give a child food that they know or suspect contains an allergen that the child must avoid.

Parents/carers should inform the nursery of any new foods introduced at home and any reactions. Staff recognise that children can develop allergies at any time, particularly when new foods are introduced during weaning.

More information is available in our allergy policy.

8. Responsive and Positive Feeding

Staff should use a responsive approach to feeding, recognising when children are hungry or full and allowing them to eat at their own pace. Children should be encouraged to explore different tastes and textures and develop independence.

Children must never be forced, pressured, shamed or punished for not eating.

Mealtimes should be positive and social. Staff should sit with children, model positive eating behaviours, allow sufficient time for eating and encourage manageable bites and thorough chewing.

9. Paediatric First Aid

Little Learners will ensure that a member of staff with a valid full paediatric first aid certificate is in the room while children are eating, in accordance with the EYFS.

Staff must know who the paediatric first aider is, where first aid equipment is kept and what to do in an emergency, including how to summon help and contact emergency services.

10. Staff Responsibilities

All staff are responsible for following this policy, knowing the individual feeding needs of the children they care for, actively supervising mealtimes, checking food before serving, following allergy and dietary requirements and understanding choking and allergy risks.

The Key Person is responsible for discussing feeding and weaning with parents/carers, keeping information up to date and ensuring relevant staff are aware of the child's needs.

Room Leaders and Managers are responsible for ensuring appropriate staffing during mealtimes, identifying who is responsible for checking food at each meal and snack,

monitoring safer eating practices, ensuring allergy procedures are followed, reviewing incidents and ensuring staff receive appropriate training.

11. Reporting Concerns

Staff must immediately report any choking incidents, suspected allergic reactions, chewing or swallowing difficulties, changes in feeding ability, concern about a child's diet or nutrition, failure to follow an allergy or medical care plan, or any occasion where a child has been left unsupervised while eating.

Incidents must be recorded in accordance with nursery procedures and parents/carers informed where appropriate.

12. Working with Parents

Little Learners will work closely with parents/carers to support children's individual feeding and weaning needs. We will maintain ongoing communication about weaning progress, new foods, allergies and intolerances, dietary requirements, feeding concerns, changes in eating behaviour and relevant advice from health professionals.

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if there are changes to the EYFS requirements or DfE guidance.