

## Howe Dell Day Care

### Food and Drink Policy And Safer Eating within Early Years

Policy originally adopted: August 2007, April 2025 amended to reflect changes in the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework

Next review due: September 2026

#### **Aim**

We are committed to providing healthy and nutritious food and drink for the children in our care. We will ensure that all food and drink is safely prepared and sensitive to the dietary, religious, and cultural requirements of each child.

We recognise the importance of working in partnership with parents to support each child's individual needs and preferences. The term '*parent*' refers to any person or body with parental responsibility, such as a foster parent or carer.

#### **Procedure**

At Howe Dell, we regard snack and mealtimes as a valuable and integral part of each child's day. These times provide important social opportunities for children to interact with peers and adults, while also supporting their understanding of healthy eating and nutrition.

To provide healthy, balanced, and nutritious food that meets each child's individual dietary, cultural, and religious needs. Hot lunches and evening tea are provided by **Hertfordshire Catering Ltd (HCL)**, a trusted provider of nutritious meals for children.

To create a safe, supportive, and inclusive mealtime environment that promotes positive eating habits.

To work in partnership with parents/carers regarding dietary requirements and preferences. No changes to a child's dietary intake or meal plans will be made without prior agreement with the child's parent.

All staff are responsible for checking that the food being provided meets all the requirements for each child with dietary needs. All food and drink provided will reflect the individual dietary needs of children, including allergies, intolerances, religious observances, and cultural preferences.

Staff will promote the good health of all children, take necessary steps to prevent the spread of infection, and take appropriate action if a child becomes ill. We are required to notify Ofsted and the local authority of any food poisoning affecting two or more children in our care. This will be reported as soon as is reasonably practicable, and within 14 days of the incident.

### **Mealtime Supervision and Safety**

Children are always seated safely during mealtimes, either in a highchair or an appropriately sized low chair, depending on their age and developmental stage. Wherever possible, meals take place in a designated eating area where distractions are minimised to support focused and safe eating.

All children remain within sight and hearing of a member of staff at all times while eating, ensuring their safety and providing immediate support if needed.

### **Healthy Choices**

- ✚ Staff will model and encourage healthy eating habits.
- ✚ Staff will provide consistent messages about healthy lifestyles to children and families.
- ✚ Parents/carers will be provided with relevant information to support healthy choices at home.

### **Drinks**

- ✚ Fresh drinking water will always be available to children.
- ✚ Milk will be offered daily as a nutritious drink option.
- ✚ Squash, fizzy drinks, and other sugary beverages will not be offered.

### **Nut-Free Environment**

We operate a strict no-nut onsite. No nuts or products containing nuts are allowed on the Howe Dell premises under any circumstances to protect children with severe allergies.

### **Paediatric First Aid (PFA)**

All staff at Howe Dell Day Care hold current Paediatric First Aid (PFA) certification and are deployed appropriately to meet the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Ofsted. A Paediatric First Aid trained staff member is always present whenever children are eating, to ensure immediate support is available in the event of choking or allergic reaction. At all times during mealtimes and snack times, children are within sight and hearing of staff.

### **Allergies and Intolerances**

All staff are made aware of the children in their care who have any special dietary requirements, allergies, or intolerances. Information regarding individual dietary is clearly displayed in the main office and in each Day Care room.

All parents must complete the dietary needs and allergy sections on the registration form. A Care Plan must be completed before a child with allergies or intolerances can be left in our care. Care Plans are updated through ongoing communication with parents/carers and health professionals to ensure children's needs are consistently met.

### **Medical Dietary Needs**

Where children have a diagnosed allergy or medical dietary requirement, parents/carers are required to provide documentation from a medical professional.

A Hertfordshire Catering medical diet request form must be completed online by the parent/carer. Meals cannot be provided by Hertfordshire Catering until this process is complete.

In cases where Hertfordshire Catering is unable to supply meals, Howe Dell Day Care will provide healthy, balanced meals that meet children's individual needs. Parents are welcome to supply a packed lunch.

### **Food Safety and Hygiene**

All food is prepared and served in line with current Food Standards Agency guidance, particularly the *Safer Food, Better Business* guidelines. All staff involved in food preparation or handling hold at least a Level 2 Food Hygiene and Safety Certificate.

Information on key allergens is displayed, and copies of allergen information are available upon request, in line with the EU Food Information for Consumers (FIC) Regulation.

Vegetarian, vegan, and religious dietary options are always available.

### **Choking Prevention and Incident Response**

All food is prepared in a way that reduces the risk of choking. Staff are trained to understand that choking is silent, and therefore children must always remain within sight and hearing during mealtimes.

Children are seated in age-appropriate, upright seating that supports safe eating posture.

Any choking incidents or near misses are recorded in detail, including how and where the incident occurred. Parents will be informed promptly. All staff are trained to follow the choking incident reporting and recording procedure.

### **Meal and Snack Provision**

We provide a selection of healthy, balanced snacks during breakfast and snack times, which may include fresh fruit, vegetables, breadsticks, rice cakes, and other nutritious options. Children are also offered milk and water to drink, helping to support healthy hydration and development.

All snacks are age-appropriate and served in suitable portion sizes, following nutritional guidance to promote healthy eating habits from an early age.

We are fully committed to meeting the individual dietary needs of every child. Allergies, intolerances, and cultural or religious dietary requirements are carefully recorded and catered for.

### **Weaning**

At Howe Dell Day Care, we are committed to supporting each child's individual weaning journey in close partnership with parents and carers. We recognise that weaning is a significant milestone in a child's development and that a flexible, responsive, and child-centred approach is essential.

We work in ongoing dialogue with parents/carers regarding their child's stage of weaning and preferences, including the texture and type of food their child is familiar with.

No assumptions are made based on age or stage. Weaning is guided by each child's developmental readiness, not chronological age alone.

Detailed records are maintained for all children under two, noting the stage of weaning, dietary requirements, and preferences.

Hertfordshire Catering LTD are kept informed of each child's age and stage to ensure suitable meals are provided.

We encourage families to refer to NHS Start for Life guidance on safe weaning practices and are happy to support them in accessing this resource.

### **Safe Weaning Practices**

We follow evidence-based practices to ensure that children are introduced to solid foods safely and appropriately, in line with current health guidance. We work closely with parents to respect individual routines, preferences, and cultural practices, supporting each child's unique weaning journey. These include:

### **Food Types and Preparation**

- ✚ First foods will be offered around 6 months of age, progressing gradually from smooth purées to mashed/blended foods and eventually chopped or minced textures, based on the child's ability.
- ✚ Foods will be mashed with a fork, blended, or served as appropriate finger foods depending on the child's stage.
- ✚ Hard fruits and vegetables (e.g., apples, carrots) will be cooked to soften before serving.
- ✚ Fruits will have pips, stones, and hard skins removed.
- ✚ Cereals will be prepared with breast milk, first infant formula, or if over six months, pasteurised full-fat cow's milk or a suitable plant-based alternative. These drinks are not offered until a child reaches 12 months.

### **Food Size, Shape, and Texture**

To reduce the risk of choking:

- ✚ Small round fruits (e.g., grapes, strawberries, cherry tomatoes) will be cut lengthwise into quarters.
- ✚ Large fruits like melons and firm fruits such as apples will be sliced, not chopped into chunks.
- ✚ Vegetables such as carrots and celery will be cut into narrow batons.
- ✚ Bread and cheese will be cut into strips, not chunks, to support safe chewing and swallowing.

### **Foods to Avoid**

- ✚ Honey will not be given to infants under 12 months due to the risk of infant botulism.
- ✚ Whole nuts and seeds will not be offered to children under five years of age.
- ✚ Raisins will not be offered to children under 12 months as a snack but may be finely chopped and included as part of a meal.

### **Choking Prevention**

Staff are fully trained in choking prevention and Paediatric First Aid. Children are always seated in appropriate, upright seating during feeding and weaning. Children are always supervised within sight and hearing during all mealtimes and snack times. If a choking incident or near miss occurs, it is recorded in detail, and parents/carers are informed promptly.

### **Packed Healthy Lunches**

At Howe Dell Day Care, we recognise that a healthy, well-balanced lunch gives children the energy they need to play, concentrate, and learn throughout the day. We are committed to supporting families in providing nutritious packed lunches that promote good health and development.

For children accessing 15 hours of funded childcare **ONLY**, parents/carers have the option to:

- ✚ Purchase a hot, nutritious meal through our catering service, or
- ✚ Provide a healthy packed lunch from home

### **Packed Lunch Guidelines**

To help keep children safe and healthy, packed lunches must not contain:

- ✚ Nuts or any food containing nuts (due to severe allergies)
- ✚ Fizzy drinks or energy drinks
- ✚ Sweets, chocolate bars, or confectionery
- ✚ Fast food (e.g., burgers, chips, fried chicken, takeaway meals)

### **Healthy Lunchbox Ideas**

A well-balanced packed lunch includes a variety of foods from the five key food groups:

- ✚ **Vegetables** – carrot sticks, cucumber slices, cherry tomatoes (quartered), sweetcorn
- ✚ **Fruit** – bananas, strawberries, grapes (cut lengthwise into quarters), apples (whole to prevent browning), orange segments
- ✚ **Grain foods** – wholemeal bread, wraps, rice cakes, pasta salads
- ✚ **Dairy** – cheese sticks, yogurt pots or tubes (low sugar), milk
- ✚ **Protein** – lean meats, boiled eggs, hummus, beans, lentils, fish

### **Tips for Encouraging Children to Eat Their Lunch**

We understand that children want to eat quickly so they can return to play. Here's how parents can support this:

- ✚ Choose easy-to-eat, finger-friendly foods
- ✚ Use containers that seal well but are easy to open – practise opening them at home
- ✚ Involve your child in choosing and preparing their lunch
- ✚ Keep choices simple and familiar, and introduce new foods slowly
- ✚ Talk with your child about food preferences and what their friends enjoy
- ✚ Be patient with picky eating – it may take multiple exposures (20–30 times) before a child accepts a new food

### **Food Safety and Choking Prevention**

- ✚ Cut grapes and cherry tomatoes lengthwise into quarters
- ✚ Slice sausages lengthwise and then into quarters
- ✚ Cut sandwiches into small quarters or fingers for easier handling

- ✚ Avoid soggy sandwiches by draining wet ingredients and keeping spreads minimal
- ✚ Use reusable containers to separate foods and prevent leaks or cross-contamination

### **Mess-Free and Child-Friendly**

- ✚ Keep portions small and easy to manage
- ✚ Cut larger fruits like melon or orange into manageable pieces
- ✚ Keep apples whole to prevent browning
- ✚ Avoid runny yoghurts or overfilled sandwiches that might spill

By working in partnership with families, we aim to encourage positive attitudes toward healthy eating that will last a lifetime.