

Food Play Policy

At The Orchard Day Nursery Kingston, we recognise that food can be a valuable resource for supporting children's learning and development when used purposefully. Food-based activities can enhance children's sensory exploration, mathematical thinking, communication and language, creativity, understanding of the world and physical development.

However, we also recognise our responsibility to promote healthy eating, minimise food waste and ensure that food is used respectfully and safely. We carefully consider whether food is the most appropriate resource for an activity and avoid unnecessary use of edible food where suitable alternatives are available.

This policy should be read alongside our Healthy Eating Policy, Allergy Management Policy, Food Safety Policy, Safeguarding Policy and Risk Assessment Procedures.

Purpose

We aim to:

- promote positive attitudes towards healthy food and nutrition
- ensure food used in play has a clear educational purpose
- minimise food waste wherever possible
- safeguard children with allergies, intolerances or medical dietary requirements
- encourage sustainable practice and respect for food
- provide inclusive experiences that all children can access safely.

Using Food in Play

Before planning any activity involving food, practitioners will consider:

- whether food is necessary to achieve the intended learning outcome
- whether a non-food alternative would provide the same experience
- the age and developmental stage of the children
- potential choking hazards
- allergies and dietary requirements
- food hygiene requirements
- opportunities to reuse materials responsibly.

Food will only be used where it genuinely enhances children's learning rather than as a routine sensory resource.

Where suitable, practitioners will use alternative materials such as playdough, coloured rice made from non-edible materials, natural resources, shredded paper, fabric, wooden loose parts or commercially produced sensory resources.

Food Safety

All food used within activities will be handled safely in accordance with current food hygiene legislation.

We will ensure:

- All food is stored appropriately before use

- Fresh food is disposed of safely after use where necessary
- Reusable dry materials are checked regularly and stored hygienically
- Hands are washed before and after food activities
- Tables and equipment are cleaned before and after activities
- Staff follow appropriate hygiene procedures throughout.

Heat-treated flour will always be used where flour is required for sensory or cooking activities to reduce the risk of harmful bacteria.

Raw flour will not be used in sensory play.

Raw eggs will not be used in activities unless they meet current food safety guidance and are used solely within supervised cooking experiences.

Choking Hazards

Children's safety is our priority.

Risk assessments will be completed before activities involving food.

Practitioners will:

- consider children's age and stage of development
- supervise children closely throughout activities
- avoid foods known to present a choking risk for younger children
- ensure food is prepared appropriately where tasting is involved.

Whole jelly cubes will never be used due to the choking risk.

Where jelly is used for sensory experiences, it will be prepared with water in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Whole grapes, cherry tomatoes, large blueberries, popcorn, whole nuts and similar choking hazards will not be used in activities with young children unless prepared in line with current safety guidance.

Allergies, Intolerances and Medical Diets

The nursery is committed to ensuring every child can participate safely.

Before any activity involving food, staff will:

- check children's allergy and dietary information
- review medical care plans where appropriate
- adapt activities to ensure all children are included
- prevent cross-contamination
- ensure suitable alternatives are available.

Information about allergens will be clearly displayed for staff.

Parents will be informed in advance where appropriate if food-based activities are planned.

Cooking Activities

Cooking experiences provide valuable opportunities for children to develop independence, confidence and healthy eating habits.

Prior to each activity staff will ensure:

- ingredients are suitable for every participating child
- allergens have been identified
- equipment is safe and age appropriate
- good hygiene practices are followed throughout
- children are supervised at all times.

Cooking activities will promote healthy, balanced foods wherever possible and support children's understanding of nutrition, where developmentally appropriate.

Promoting Healthy Eating

In line with current early years nutritional guidance, we aim to help children develop healthy relationships with food.

Practitioners will:

- promote a balanced and varied diet
- encourage children to explore a wide range of healthy foods
- celebrate cultural diversity through food experiences
- avoid promoting foods high in sugar, salt or saturated fat as everyday choices
- encourage independence during food preparation and mealtimes
- use positive language around food and avoid labelling foods as "good" or "bad."

Food activities will complement our healthy eating curriculum and support children's understanding of where food comes from, how it is prepared and why good nutrition is important.

Sustainability and Reducing Food Waste

We recognise the importance of using food responsibly.

Where food is used:

- only small quantities will be provided
- reusable dry materials (such as dried pasta, rice or pulses) will be stored safely and reused where appropriate
- surplus edible food suitable for consumption will not be discarded unnecessarily
- practitioners will carefully consider whether food is the most appropriate resource before planning activities
- opportunities will be taken to discuss food waste, growing food and caring for the environment with children in age-appropriate ways.

We recognise that food is a valuable resource and will treat it with respect.

Planning and Risk Assessment

All planned food activities will identify:

- the educational purpose of the activity
- ingredients being used
- allergens present

- any necessary adaptations
- supervision requirements
- hygiene considerations
- any identified risks and control measures.

Children's allergy information will always be readily available to practitioners before activities begin.

Monitoring

The Nursery Manager will monitor the implementation of this policy through regular observations, planning scrutiny and risk assessment reviews.

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner following changes to legislation, EYFS requirements or national nutrition guidance.

This policy was adopted on	Signed on behalf of the nursery	Date for review
<i>05/08/2026</i>		<i>December 2026</i>