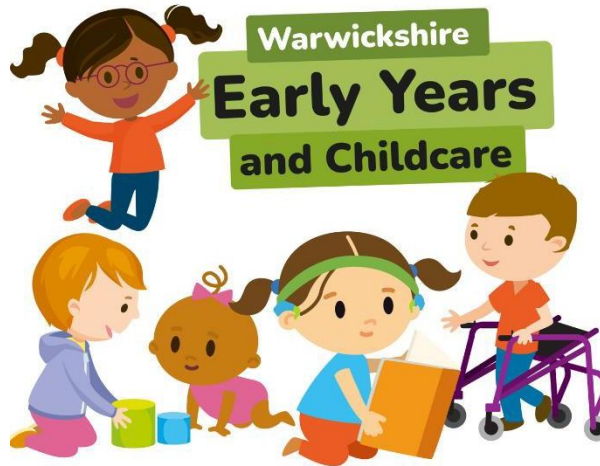


# Warwickshire Early Years Quality Inclusion SEND and Safeguarding Team

## Lunchbox Policy

### Policy Framework for Early Years Providers



#### Purpose of this model policy:

This model policy has been developed to support all Early Years Providers working with children aged from birth to five years, with a focus on good practice in relation to procedures around lunchboxes.

**This is a policy framework and must not be used in its entirety. Instead, each individual setting should reflect upon their own policies and procedures and adapt the policy framework based upon these.**

Links to settings individual policies may also need to be made when appropriate, which may include:

Safer Eating Practices Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Inclusion and Equality Policy, Allergy and Medical Needs Policy, Behaviour Policy, Staff induction and Training Policy, Staff Code of Conduct Policy, Parental Involvement Policy, and Environmental Sustainability Policy.

|                   |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Reviewed on:      | September 2026 |
| Next Review Date: | September 2027 |



**Please note:**

---

Additional elements to consider are included within the policy and are highlighted in **yellow**. Early Years Providers should consider these points in relation to their own policies and procedures and include reference to these points when relevant.

## Lunch box Policy Framework

### Policy Statement

At [Setting Name], we believe that providing a nutritious lunch is vital in helping young children maintain their energy levels, engage in learning, and thrive in their overall development. This policy ensure that all packed lunches brought from home provide children with nutritious food that supports their growth, development, and learning, while also meeting food safety and allergy management standards, in line with the **EYFS 2026 statutory framework** and the **Department for Education's nutritional guidance**.

This Safer Eating practices policy is linked with other policies for the setting, including:

- Safer Eating Practices Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Healthy Eating Policy
- Inclusion and Equality Policy
- Allergy and Medical Needs Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Staff induction and Training Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct Policy
- Parental Involvement Policy
- Environmental Sustainability Policy

This policy is guided by the following statutory and legal frameworks:

- [EYFS 2026 Sections 3.63–3.71: Food and Drink](#)
- [Childcare Act 2006](#)
- [DfE Early Years Nutrition Guidance \(2025\)](#)
- [Food Safety Act 1990](#) and associated hygiene regulations
- [Food Standards Act 1999](#)

## Policy Aims

We aim to:

- Promote the provision of healthy, balanced, and nutritious lunches that support children's growth and development.
- Ensure that all food brought into the setting is stored safely and in accordance with current food safety guidelines.
- Maintain a safe environment for children with allergies, through clear communication and strict adherence to allergy management protocols.
- Respect and accommodate individual dietary requirements, cultural food practices, and parental preferences.
- Establish a calm and supportive mealtime environment where children feel secure and at ease, with supervision provided by staff who are appropriately trained and qualified in line with EYFS statutory requirements.
- Encourage positive attitudes towards food and mealtimes, fostering enjoyment and inclusivity.
- Support families by providing guidance and information to help them prepare safe, developmentally appropriate, nutritious lunchboxes for their children.

In line with the [DFE EYFS Nutrition Guidance](#) we ask families to provide food within a lunchbox which contains healthy, balanced and nutritious food, and avoid foods which are high in sugar, fat, salt, or ultra-processed ingredients.

We encourage balanced lunchboxes that:

- Include fresh fruit and vegetables
- Include a starchy food, such as sandwiches, wraps, or pasta (aiming for wholegrain whenever possible and at least once week)
- Include a protein source
- Include a dairy options (or non-dairy alternative) like cheese or yoghurt
- Avoid sweets, chocolate bars, and crisps as regular items

We understand that young children need smaller portions than adults. While there are no set guidelines, we aim to provide portion sizes that suit each child's age, size, and appetite. We encourage families to work with us to monitor and adjust portions to support healthy growth and nutrition.

## Safe Food Preparation

At [Setting Name], in line with current guidance, we ask parents to prepare food to a size and shape that is right for a child's size, age and stage of weaning. This helps avoid choking.

We ask that when preparing food, parents ensure that they avoid round shapes as these are a choking hazard. Fruits such as grapes, raspberries and strawberries should be cut lengthways and then halve again (quarters).

We encourage families to follow best practices in food preparation to ensure children's safety during mealtimes.

A table with advice on preparing and serving food to babies and young children can be found [here](#).

## Safe and Child-Friendly Lunchboxes

To support children's independence and ensure food safety, we ask parents to ensure the following when packing their child's lunch:

- Clearly label all lunchboxes and containers with your child's full name to ensure proper handling and avoid mix-ups.
- Use easy-to-open containers that your child can manage independently. This encourages self-help skills and builds confidence during mealtimes.
- Ensure lunchboxes and individual containers are not made from glass, as they can break easily and pose a safety risk within the setting.
- Choose insulated, sealed lunch bags for perishable items, and where refrigeration is not available. As a setting, we follow the '4-hour rule'—allowing food to be kept out of refrigeration for up to 4 hours, but only once.
- Pack foods that can be safely stored at room temperature if refrigeration is not available.
- Choose foods that are suitable for their child's developmental stage and prepared in a way that reduces choking risks.

## Managing dietary needs and allergies

At [setting name], we are committed to managing dietary needs and allergies with sensitivity and care. Children and their lunchboxes are seated in a way that prevents cross-contamination, while ensuring no child is singled out or labelled due to their dietary requirements.

Staff will be made aware of each child's individual requirements and trained to prevent cross-contamination.

Staff will model positive eating behaviours by sitting with children during mealtimes, offering support with opening containers, and encouraging social interaction. Where appropriate and informed by knowledge of individual dietary needs, staff will provide gentle, pressure-free encouragement for children to explore new foods, while promoting appropriate portion sizes to support healthy eating habits.

At [setting name] to protect children with severe allergies, **we are a strictly nut-free setting**. We ask families to ensure that:

- No peanut butter, Nutella, or other nut-based spreads

- **No cereal bars or baked goods containing nuts**
- **No products labelled “may contain nuts”**

## Cultural and Religious Considerations

We respect and accommodate all cultural and religious dietary practices. At [setting name], families are encouraged to share relevant information with staff so we can support children’s needs sensitively and inclusively.

## Drinks

To support healthy eating practices at [setting name], families are not required to provide a drink with their child’s packed lunch. Fresh drinking water is considered the most suitable option to accompany meals and is readily available to all children during every mealtime.

If drinks other than water (e.g. squash or juice) are brought into the setting, they will be stored safely and out of children's view and reach. These drinks will be returned to families at the end of the nursery day, as children's hydration needs are fully met through the fresh water provided during mealtimes.

This approach supports our commitment to healthy eating practices and encourages children to develop positive habits around hydration.

## Monitoring and Communication

At [setting name] in order to ensure alignment with the settings lunchbox policy, staff will discreetly monitor lunchbox content. If concerns arise, parents will be contacted in a supportive and non-judgmental manner. As part of our on-going support to our families, resources and guidance will be offered to all families to help make informed choices. Feedback is welcomed from all families to ensure the policy remains inclusive and effective.

## Parent Responsibilities

At [setting name], we prioritise building strong, supportive relationships with our families to create a nurturing environment for every child. In our commitment to promoting the health and wellbeing of all children, we kindly ask parents to:

- **Follow the lunchbox guidance** provided by the setting and avoid restricted items
- **Do not include any products containing nuts**, as we are a nut-free setting.
- **Label lunchboxes clearly** with the child’s name.
- **Inform staff** of any allergies, dietary needs, or cultural requirements.
- **Prepare food safely and hygienically** at home.
- **Avoid sending foods that require reheating** or pose choking risks.
- **Communicate openly** with staff about any concerns or changes in dietary needs.
- **Support healthy eating messages** at home to reinforce consistency between home and setting.

## Supervision

Children will always be within sight and hearing of a member of staff while eating their packed lunch, as choking can occur silently and without warning. To minimise risk, staff will be positioned to face the children during mealtimes, enabling close observation of eating behaviours, discouraging food sharing, and ensuring a swift response to any signs of choking or allergic reactions.

At all times, at least one staff member present will hold a valid paediatric first aid certificate, obtained through a full course that meets the criteria outlined in Annex A of the EYFS framework.

## Staff Training

At [setting name], in order to ensure a safe and supportive mealtime environment, all staff involved in supervising children during lunch will:

- Be fully aware of and adhere to basic food hygiene and personal hygiene standards, as outlined in our Healthy Workplace Policy and the Food Standards Agency guidance.
- Have completed relevant training in:
  - Food allergies and intolerances
  - Food safety and hygiene

In addition, at least one staff member present during mealtimes will hold a full 12-hour Paediatric First Aid (PFA) certificate, which includes essential training on choking and anaphylaxis.

To maintain high standards and consistency, regular reviews of lunchtime practices will be carried out. These will include team discussions and parent surveys, helping to ensure the continued effectiveness of the lunchbox approach and alignment with best practice.

## Lunchbox storage

At [Setting Name], we are committed to supporting food safety and promoting children's independence during mealtimes. To ensure safe storage and maintain food freshness, each base room is equipped with a designated lunchbox area within the kitchen fridge. Lunchboxes are consistently stored in these clearly marked areas and kept refrigerated throughout the day. We maintain these spaces to be clean, secure, and easily accessible at all times.

In settings where refrigeration is not available you may consider we ask parents to support food safety by providing ice packs or insulated lunch bags to help keep food cool and fresh. If perishable items are brought in, they will be stored in clearly labelled sections within a fridge to uphold hygiene and food safety standards.

To prevent lunchboxes from being mixed up, within our setting, the following procedures are in place:

- All lunchboxes must be clearly named by parents, and this is checked daily by a named member of staff.
- Individual fridge trays, cubbies, or baskets are used to store lunchboxes, each clearly marked with the child's name/photo for easy identification.

## Creating a positive and safe mealtime experience

At [Setting Name], we aim to create a designated, age-appropriate space for children to enjoy their lunch as this is essential for promoting comfort, safety, and positive social interaction. Mealtimes will take place in a calm, distraction-free environment to support children's focus and enjoyment of their food. Staff will ensure the space is welcoming and conducive to relaxed, positive mealtime experiences.

We will provide child-appropriate seating arrangements that promote independence and social interaction. Seating will be sized appropriately for children, with babies and younger children safely positioned in highchairs or low chairs as needed.

Where possible, parents are encouraged to include appropriate cutlery in their child's lunchbox, such as spoons for yoghurts or forks for salads. To support this, we will maintain a small supply of spare cutlery to ensure all children can eat comfortably, even if items are occasionally forgotten.

To support hygiene, promote independence, develop an understanding of personal space and simplify cleaning routines, we will use tablecloths/placemats to create clearly defined individual eating areas for each child.

We will provide clearly labelled bins to support effective waste disposal during mealtimes. Where appropriate, composting options will be introduced to promote environmental awareness and help children learn about sorting waste responsibly.

## Monitoring and Review

At [Setting Name], we are committed to maintaining high standards in food safety and nutrition. To support this, we carry out regular audits of our food practices to ensure they remain safe, healthy, and in line with current guidance.

Allergy action plans and incident logs are reviewed each term to help us identify any patterns and make improvements where needed.

Staff training in food hygiene and allergy awareness is refreshed annually, or sooner if required to keep everyone confident and up to date.

We also value the voices of our families and children, and we actively seek their feedback to help shape our approach and ensure mealtimes are safe, inclusive, and enjoyable for all.

**Appendix 1**

As a setting, we follow the food and drink guidelines and so ask parents to provide in their child's lunch box:

| Provide                                                                                                                                                                                 | Avoid                                                                                                                                               | Limit                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Provide at least 1 portion of vegetables and/or fruit (not including dried fruit).                                                                                                      | Avoid fruit tinned in syrup and choose fruit tinned in juice.                                                                                       | Limit the salt content in bread and bread products. Choose those with a lower salt content which are labelled as 'low' (green) or 'medium' (amber) in salt.                                                                                                                                                               |
| Provide a variety of vegetables or fruit across the week.                                                                                                                               | Avoid added salt and sugar in tinned vegetables and pulses and choose no added salt and sugar options or those tinned in water.                     | Limit oily fish to a maximum of twice per week.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Provide a portion of starchy food, with at least 1 lunch a week being a wholegrain starchy food                                                                                         | Avoid flavoured dried rice, pasta and noodle products e.g. packets and pots of instant flavoured noodles, pasta and rice.                           | Limit the provision of processed meat products (e.g. sausages, breaded chicken, meatballs), processed fish products (e.g. fish fingers, fish cakes), and products made from meat alternatives (e.g. vegetarian sausages), to once a week for each of the 3 types as these products can be high in saturated fat and salt. |
| Provide non-dairy alternatives that are unsweetened, and calcium fortified (e.g. oat milk or soya milk).                                                                                | Avoid sweetened yoghurts and fromage frais (including non-dairy alternatives) and choose plain unsweetened options.                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Provide full fat dairy foods (such as cheese and unsweetened yoghurt and fromage frais) for children under the age of 2 and gradually introduce lower-fat dairy options after this age. | Avoid foods high in saturated fat, salt, and/or sugars like cakes, sweet and savoury pastries, biscuits, crisps, chocolate and other confectionary. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Provide a portion of protein from a variety of sources                                                                                                                                  | Avoid artificial sweeteners as they may encourage children to prefer very sweet foods                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Provide at least 1 lunch for children each week which uses beans, lentils, pulses or a meat alternative as the protein source.                                                          | Avoid skimmed and 1% cow's milk.                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Provide vegetarian and vegan children with a variety of protein sources such as beans, pulses, and meat alternatives each week as part of lunch and tea.                                | Avoid sugary drinks (including fruit juices, squash and smoothies).                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Provide oily fish (such as salmon, sardines or mackerel) at least once every 3 weeks (or as part a tea at home).                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

Table based on the guidelines with the EYFS Nutrition Guidance. This table may need to be adapted based upon individual children's dietary requirements and requirements you have as a setting, for example if families also provide snack/additional meals – table 2 of the EYFS nutrition guidance should be used to reflect on the above statements.



## Appendix 2



## Early years food choking hazards

Below is a table of advice on key foods for care givers who are involved with preparing and serving food for babies and young children (under 5 years old)

| Vegetable and fruits           | Advice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pips or stones in fruit        | Always check beforehand and remove hard pips or stones from fruit.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Small fruits                   | Cut small round fruits like grapes, cherries, berries, strawberries and cherry tomatoes, into small pieces: cut lengthways and then again cut them in halves (quarters).                                                                            |
| Large fruits and firm fruits   | Cut large fruits like melon and firm fruits like apple into slices instead of small chunks. For very young children, consider grating or mashing firm fruits, or softening them up by steaming or simmering.                                        |
| Vegetables                     | Cut vegetables like carrots, cucumber and celery into narrow batons. For very young children consider grating or mashing firm vegetables and legumes like butter beans, chickpeas and tofu, or softening them up by steaming or simmering.          |
| Skin on fruit and vegetables   | Consider removing the skin from fruit and vegetables, especially for very young children. Peeled fruit and vegetables can be swallowed more easily.                                                                                                 |
| Cooking fruit and vegetables   | Consider softening firm fruit and vegetables (such as carrots, broccoli, yam and apples) by steaming or simmering until soft. Serve cut into slices or narrow batons.                                                                               |
| Meat and fish                  | Advice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Sausages and hot dogs          | Cut sausages and hot dogs into short strips. Cut them in half and then lengthways or as thinly as possible. Peeling the skin off the sausages helps them to be swallowed more easily.                                                               |
| Meat or fish                   | Remove bones from meat or fish. Cut meat into strips as thinly as possible. Remove skin and fat from meat and fish, it will help the food pass smoothly down the throat.                                                                            |
| Cheese                         | Advice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Grate or cut cheese            | Grate or cut cheese into short strips. Cut lumps of cheese as narrow as possible.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Nuts and seeds                 | Advice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Chop or flake whole nuts       | Chop or flake whole nuts, peanuts and seeds. Whole nuts should not be given to children under five years old.                                                                                                                                       |
| Bread                          | Advice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| White bread and other breads   | White bread can form a ball shape with a dough-like texture at the back of a child's throat, if not chewed properly. Brown bread or toasted white bread are good alternatives. Cut bread, chapatis, naan bread and other breads into narrow strips. |
| Snacks and other foods         | Advice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Popcorn                        | Do not give babies and young children popcorn.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Chewing gum and marshmallows   | Do not give babies and young children chewing gum or marshmallows.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Peanut butter                  | Do not give babies and young children peanut butter on its own, only use as a spread.                                                                                                                                                               |
| Jelly cubes                    | Do not give babies and young children raw jelly cubes.                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Boiled sweets and ice cubes    | Do not give babies and young children boiled, hard, gooey, sticky or cough sweets, or ice cubes.                                                                                                                                                    |
| Raisins and other dried fruits | Do not give babies under the age of 1 whole raisins or dried fruits. Cut them into small pieces.                                                                                                                                                    |

Make sure food is prepared appropriately for children under 5 years old, see: <https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/>

It is also advisable that care givers are familiar with how to respond to a choking incident, see: How to stop a child from choking: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/first-aid-and-safety/first-aid/how-to-stop-a-child-from-choking/> and How to resuscitate a child: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/first-aid-and-safety/first-aid/how-to-resuscitate-a-child/>

[https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2021/09/Early-Years-Choking-Hazards-Table\\_FINAL\\_21-Sept-2021.pdf](https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2021/09/Early-Years-Choking-Hazards-Table_FINAL_21-Sept-2021.pdf)