

Food, Nutrition and Beverages

Policy Statement

Meerilinga recognises the importance of healthy eating to promote the growth and development of young children and is committed to supporting the healthy food and drink choices of children in our care. It is acknowledged that the early childhood setting has an important role in supporting families in healthy eating. Our service therefore recognises the importance of supporting families to provide healthy food and drink to their children.

Policy Purpose

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Services are required by legislation to ensure the provision of healthy foods and drinks that meet the requirements for children according to the *Australian Dietary Guidelines*. It is essential that our service partners with families to provide education about nutrition and promote healthy eating habits for young children to positively influence their health and wellbeing and reduce the risk of diet-related conditions and chronic diseases in children.

We believe in providing a positive eating environment that reflects dietary requirements, cultural and family values, and promotes lifelong learning for children, as we commit to implementing and embedding the healthy eating key messages.

We recognise food is used to help celebrate special occasions in different families, cultures and festivals. Food is an important part of any celebration in all nations of the world, regardless of culture or religion.

Scope

This policy applies to children, families, community and workers including volunteers and students engaged with Meerilinga programs and services. The daily nutritional needs of a child will be in context for the number of hours in a service on any given day for the duration of that child's attendance.

Exclusions

Policy Review

Biennial or from time to time when the organisation may make changes to this policy to improve the effectiveness of its operations and customer service.

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| Policy Reviewed | 22 August 2023 | By | Advisor Policy & Compliance |
| Approved By | CEO | | |
| Previous Review | 22 February 2021 | | |

Implementation

Parents/guardians will provide a sufficient amount of food for the duration of their child's daily session of attendance. Our progressive mealtimes allow for morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea. We recommend a 'food safe', clearly labelled container or lunch bag that can be easily opened by the child.

Parents/guardians will inform Educators and staff during Bindi Kindi orientation that their child may require a feeding bottle during their session of attendance.

Refer to 'Preparation and Storage of Feeding Bottles' in the Process section of this Policy.

We encourage families to send a variety of healthy food choices with no preparatory needs such as cooking and heating. Pre-cut fresh fruits and vegetables, cheeses, dried fruits, yogurt, and whole grain breads or crackers are good options.

Foods to limit are known as 'discretionary choices', these foods are high in kilojoules, saturated fat, added sugar and salt. Discretionary foods are not an essential or necessary part of our dietary pattern such as, sweet biscuits, cake, fried foods, crisps etc.

Choices should also consider children's age and experience in managing their food and beverage needs independently to avoid complex mixing, peeling, difficult packaging and where children may be transitioning between first and adult teeth, temporarily preparing foods by removing hard skins and pre-cut is recommended.

Information on Healthy Eating for Children, including healthy food choices, recommended daily intake specific to age and gender of a child can be located here:

https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/The%20Guidelines/n55f_child_ren_brochure.pdf Other topics include hard foods that may increase the risk of choking for children under 5 years of age. Meerilinga does not allow popcorn to be consumed by children attending our Early Learning Programs.

Water is the primary drink and children will have accessibility to their water bottles throughout the session. Children are to bring their own clearly labelled water bottle filled with fresh water. Educators will re-fill the bottle with water as required throughout the day.

Learning about healthy lifestyles, including nutrition is integral to children's wellbeing and self-confidence and embedded in everyday routines and experiences. Children, families, Educators, students and staff will be encouraged to develop healthy eating choices.

Restrictions are in place to ensure protection of children and others with food sensitivity or allergy and only healthy options are demonstrated and encouraged.

All Meerilinga programs are 'Allergy Aware' and nut free.

Anaphylaxis is a potentially life threatening, severe allergic reaction after exposure to an allergen (usually to foods, insects or medicines) and is treated as a medical emergency. We have children enrolled who live with anaphylaxis. A notice will be displayed at the entry of the service, notifying all persons that there are children enrolled at the service who are at risk of Anaphylaxis. The allergens to be avoided will be listed on the notice eg: raw egg, walnut etc and families must avoid packing foods containing those ingredients. Educators will be vigilant when monitoring foods consumed at mealtimes.

Refer to Medical Conditions policy and process.

Charity Food Services

In recent years, charity food service operations for food recovery and redistribution have expanded in Western Australia.

Meerilinga Children and Community Services are a charity food service provider and may participate in food recovery and redistribution to local communities and vulnerable people through community food pantries at service locations.

The [WA Food Act 2008](#) and [Food Regulations 2009](#) definition of 'food business' means any undertaking, whether for profit or not and whether public or private, carrying out any of the activities related to any stage of production, processing and distribution of food.

This includes organisations that receive food surplus either, food redistribution organisations or food relief charity organisations.

Food that is directed to vulnerable populations has the same protective measures as food stored, prepared and served to paying consumers. Food safety is an integral aspect of managing food donations and distributions.

Refer to Charity Food Services process within this Policy

Food safety

Meerilinga will follow the [Australian and New Zealand Food Safety Standards](#) in relation to food safety within our programs and service. This includes but not limited to:

- [Standard 1.2.5](#) - Information requirements – date marking for food:
 - Date marking of food, use-by or best before dates
- [Standard 3.2.2](#) - Food Safety Practices and General Requirements:
 - Worker's food handling skills and training
 - Food transportation
 - Food packaging
 - Food storage and display
 - Food disposal

When choosing and packing food, families must consider how it will be kept cool for the day to prevent it from spoiling. To ensure children's food is stored safely and within the 'safe temperature zone' at the service, food containers or bags containing 'high risk foods' such as cold meats, dairy products or cooked rice or pasta will be stored in the refrigerator.

Family culture and religion will be respected, where there is request for 'high risk foods' to be kept warm, the food must be stored in an insulated food container such as a 'Food Thermos'.

At the time of delivery, families must:

- Inform Educators if the child's food container needs to be refrigerated or not and
- If required, give Educators the child's made-up and appropriately labelled feeding bottles to be refrigerated.

Educators will monitor the safe storage of children's food throughout the day.

Educators, staff and students will have access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, apron and hair cover to use when preparing and serving food. After use, aprons will be laundered and stored onsite.

Refer to Health, Hygiene and Infection Control policy and process for guidelines on food handling and laundering at the service.

Progressive Mealtimes

In recognising children as active participants in their own learning, children should be encouraged to make meaningful decisions about elements of their own education and care. Incorporating progressive mealtimes into the educational program allows children to choose to eat when they are hungry, rather than according to a timetable.

Children can gather in small groups to enjoy meals together, without interrupting the needs and play of others. This also encourages quieter, more social and meaningful interactions at mealtimes and allows for a smoother flow throughout the day.

Children can make decisions based on their own needs and can be supported to access food and water throughout the day by educators/staff, who actively participate in mealtimes.

Food in Play

Educators and students will not incorporate food in play. Code of Ethics aspects for no food play decisions and include being conscious of principles such as:

- Biodegradability;
- Reducing waste;
- Recycling potential;
- Sourcing of the product including fair work labour laws;
- Using food as learning materials teaches young children that it is acceptable to waste limited resources. Therefore, questioning the use of food when families are struggling to afford this necessity. Food is a precious resource that should be treated with great care to minimise waste;
- Using food as learning materials has the potential of disrespecting teaching about diverse groups. When teachers encourage children to play with food important to their cultures, they need to consider the possibility that using food as learning materials may offend some cultural groups who use that food for religious or ethnic celebration e.g. rice and beans.

Sustainable food alternatives are to be sort and ensure that all children to have the opportunity to participant in play.