

Yarram Early Learning Centre

Healthy Eating and Oral Health

Purpose

The educators, staff and management acknowledge the importance of healthy eating and oral health behaviours, which contribute to overall health and wellbeing. This policy confirms our commitment to:

- encourage children to make healthy food and drink choices
- promote the importance of a healthy lifestyle, which includes drinking water, eating healthy food and maintaining oral health.
- ensure that the dietary and cultural needs of children and families are taken into consideration when planning menus for incursions and activities.

As a health promoting service, we will promote healthy eating and oral health to children, educators, staff and families through learning, policies, creating a safe and healthy physical and social environment and developing community links and partnerships.

Policy statement

Background

Good nutrition is the balanced eating of a variety of foods, and is especially important for children as they require a large amount of nutrients for growth and development. Research has shown that, when offered a variety of healthy foods, children can and do make good choices. It is also important to provide preschool children with a good foundation in healthy eating, as most children have formed lifelong eating habits before they reach school age. Yarram Early Learning provides many opportunities for children to experience a range of healthy food, and to learn about food choices from staff and other children. Staff are well placed to build this awareness among children and their families, while respecting lifestyle choices, and cultural and religious values. (Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, p30 – refer to Sources).

Oral health is essential for children's overall health and wellbeing. Oral diseases can negatively affect individuals through pain, discomfort, general health and quality of life. The main oral health condition experienced by children is tooth decay, affecting over half of all Australian children, making it five times more prevalent than asthma.¹ Tooth decay is Australia's most prevalent health problem despite being preventable.²

Food Practices

Yarram Early Learning requires parents to supply a suitable lunch box that contains:

- a morning snack
- a lunch meal

¹ Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health, 2011, Dental caries trends in Australian school children, *Australian Dental Journal*, vol 56, pp 227–30.

² Rogers JG, 2011, Evidence-based oral health promotion resource, Prevention and Population Health Branch, Government of Victoria, Department of Health, Melbourne.

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- an afternoon snack.

Bringing a lunch box from home helps to build independence and consistency of practise between home and at Yarram Early Learning. The service has the resource to heat or refrigerate food as required. Some suggestions of suitable snack items include: fruit and /or vegetables, whole or cut, for morning and afternoon tea, / sandwiches, cheese and dry biscuits. Staff will encourage children to eat their healthy food option first. Children will spend eating times either indoors and/or outdoors, providing opportunities for flexible and relaxed eating.

Guidelines for Healthy Eating

The Australian Government has produced guidelines, recommendations and resources for healthy eating activity in early childhood settings, including the National Health and Medical Research Council's Australian Dietary Guidelines (refer to Sources) and the Get Up & Grow: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood resources (refer to Sources). Practical, healthy eating advice is also available to early childhood services and schools via a telephone advice line: the Healthy Eating Advisory Service (HEAS – refer to Sources), run by Nutrition Australia. Early childhood education and care services can also register for the Achievement Program (refer to Sources). This program is designed to create safe, healthy and friendly environments for learning, by promoting physical, mental and social health and wellbeing.

Whole service engagement

It is recognised that every member of the service impacts on children's health and can contribute to creating an environment that promotes healthy eating and good oral health. All members of our service, including educators, staff, children, families and volunteers, will be supported in implementing this policy.

Definitions

Healthy eating and oral Health: For the purposes of this policy and for the Healthy Early Childhood Services Achievement Program, the 'Healthy Eating and Oral Health' health priority area focuses on supporting healthy eating, including nutrition, positive food habits and food literacy, and supporting oral health and hygiene practices.

Healthy eating: Eating a wide variety of foods from the five food groups each day. These are:

- fruit
- vegetables and legumes/beans
- grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain
- milk, unsweetened yoghurt, cheese and alternatives
- lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans.

Healthy eating also means eating in a way that is socially and culturally appropriate, having regular meals and snacks and eating food to satisfy hunger, appetite and energy needs.³ It also refers to preparing, serving

³ Nutrition Australia Victorian Division, www.nutritionaustralia.org

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and eating food in a way that recognises its importance as a social and cultural activity.

Nutrition: The process of providing or obtaining the food necessary for health and growth.⁴

Discretionary/sometimes food and drink: Discretionary/sometimes food and drink is high in fat, sugar and salt or a combination of these.⁵ They typically have very little nutritional value and are often processed and packaged. Examples of discretionary food and drink include:

- chocolate, confectionery, jelly
- sweet biscuits, high fat/salt savoury biscuits, chips
- high sugar/high fat cakes and slices
- cream, ice cream
- deep fried foods (e.g. hot chips) and pastry-based foods (e.g. pies, sausage rolls and pasties)
- most fast food and takeaway foods
- some processed meats (e.g. sausages, frankfurts/hot dogs, salami, strasbourg, devon, some commercial chicken nuggets and fish fingers)
- soft drinks, fruit juice and fruit drinks, cordial, sports drinks, energy drinks, flavoured milk and flavoured mineral water.⁶

Oral health: A standard of health of the oral and related tissues that enables an individual to eat, speak and socialise without active disease, discomfort or embarrassment and that contributes to general wellbeing.⁷

Food literacy: A collection of inter-related knowledge, skills and behaviours required to plan, manage, select, prepare and eat food to meet (dietary) needs.⁸

Procedures and responsibilities

Leadership and commitment

- Educators, staff, families and children are active participants in the development and implementation of the whole service Healthy Eating and Oral Health Policy.
- Educators, staff and families are provided with information about policy requirements, with opportunities to provide feedback and input.

⁴ <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/nutrition>

⁵ National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013, Australian Dietary Guidelines, <http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au>

⁶ Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, Get Up & Grow: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood, <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-early-childhood-nutrition-resources>

⁷ COAG Health Council, 2015, Healthy Mouths Healthy Lives: Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2015-2024, <http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports/ArtMID/514/ArticleID/81>

⁸ Vidgen HA, Gallegos D, 2014, Defining Food Literacy and its components, *Appetite*, 76, 50-59, Retrieved from https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/apfnc/wp-content/uploads/sites/119/2015/06/Vidgen_2014_food-literacy-Appetite.pdf

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Healthy physical environment

- Water (preferably tap water) is accessible for drinking at all times.
- Healthy food and drinks are promoted and discretionary/sometimes food and drinks are discouraged for snacks and lunches brought into the service.
- There is suitable space for breastfeeding and storing breastmilk. *
- Best practices are followed in relation to bottle feeding and sipper cups as outlined in the [NHMRC Infant Feeding Guidelines](#), such as not putting an infant to sleep while drinking from a bottle and a cup can be introduced around six months, to teach infants the skill of sipping drinks from a cup.
- Safe food handling practices are followed, including safe procedures for food storage, handling, preparation and disposal and food safety training.

Healthy culture

- Diversity and culture are considered when implementing healthy eating and oral health practices and when menu planning.
- Educators interact with children at meal times and role model healthy eating.
- Food and drinks are not used as an incentive or reward.
- Celebrations, fundraising and events promote healthy food options and discourage discretionary/sometimes food options.
- Oral hygiene practices are promoted and undertaken at the service when appropriate.

Child teaching and learning

- Children are educated about healthy eating and oral health, including how to make healthy choices about food and the importance of tooth brushing.
- Educators and staff are supported to access professional development and resources to enable them to deliver healthy eating and oral health education.

Supported staff and educators

- Educators are supported to consume healthy foods and drinks and maintain good oral health practices at work.
- Healthy eating and oral health information and policy requirements are included in educator and staff orientation/induction.
- When food is provided to educators and staff for meetings, celebrations and events, healthy food options are included and discretionary options are discouraged.
- Supporting educators and staff to access resources to increase their capacity to promote oral health and healthy eating initiatives

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- Ensuring the implementation of adequate health and hygiene procedures, and safe practices for handling, preparing and storing food, to minimise risks to children being educated and cared for by the service (Regulation 77) (refer to Hygiene Policy and Food Safety Policy)
- Ensuring that all staff comply with the Food Safety Act
- Ensuring that all staff are aware of a child's food allergies and/or other medical conditions on enrolment or on initial diagnosis.
- Ensuring measures are in place to prevent cross-contamination of any food given to children with diagnosed food allergies and/or diabetes (refer to Anaphylaxis Policy, Asthma Policy, Diabetes, Policy and Food Safety Policy)
- Ensuring that all staff are aware of, and plan for, the dietary needs of children diagnosed with diabetes (refer to Diabetes Policy)
- Ensuring that fresh drinking water is readily available at all times, and reminding children to drink water throughout the day, including at snack/lunch times (Regulation 78(1)(a))
- Ensuring that food and drinks are available to children at frequent and regular intervals throughout the day (Regulation 78(1)(b))
- Ensuring that celebrations, fundraising activities and other Incursion are consistent with the purposes and values of this policy and service procedures.
- Promoting that breastfeeding is welcome at the service.
- Embedding opportunities to learn about healthy eating and oral health in the educational program, throughout the year.
- Providing adequate supervision (refer to Definitions) for all children at all times, including at mealtimes.
- Ensuring that cultural and religious practices/requirements of families are accommodated to support children's learning and development.
- Ensuring food and drink are not used as a bribe, incentive or reward.

Families and community partnerships

- Healthy eating and oral health information is provided to families, such as information about accessing local dental services and how to create healthy and nutritious meals.
- The service's menu (if applicable), recipes and healthy eating and oral health policy/s will be made available to families.
- Partnerships are established with relevant organisations and health professionals to support healthy eating and oral health practices where appropriate.
- Providing healthy suggestions for morning/afternoon tea and/or lunchboxes for children.
- Discouraging parents/guardians from providing children with 'sometimes' foods and drinks (refer to Definitions)

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Parents and Guardians are responsible for:

- Promoting that breastfeeding is welcome at the service.
- Complying with the requirements of this policy.
- Providing details of specific nutritional/dietary requirements, including the need to accommodate cultural or religious practices or food allergies, on their child's enrolment form, and discussing these with the Nominated Supervisor prior to the child's commencement at the service, and if requirements change over time (refer to Anaphylaxis Policy, Asthma Policy and Diabetes Policy).
- Communicating regularly with staff regarding children's specific nutritional requirements and dietary needs, including food preferences.
- Encouraging their child/ren to drink an adequate amount of water.
- Providing healthy, nutritious food for snacks/meals, including fruits and vegetables where applicable.
- Providing nutritious food and drinks for celebrations, fundraising activities and Incursion, consistent with service policy.

Relevant legislation and policy documents

- [Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010](#)
- [Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011](#)
- PART 4.2—CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY 97 Division 1—Health, safety and wellbeing of children—Regulations 77, 78, 79, 80
- PART 4.7—LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE MANAGEMENT Division 2—Policies and procedures—Regulation 168 (2) (a) (i)
- [ACECOA National Quality Standard 2018 – Quality Area 2](#)
- [Quality Area 6 – Collaborative Partnerships with families and communities](#)
- [Quality Area 7 – Governance and Leadership](#)
- [Get Up and Grow. Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood. Australian Government, 2009](#)
- [Belonging, Being and Becoming. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Commonwealth of Australia, 2009](#)
- [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework For all Children from Birth to Eight Years. Department of Education and Training, 2016](#)
- [Australian Dietary Guidelines, National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013](#)
- [Infant Feeding Guidelines, National Health and Medical Research Council, 2012](#)
- [Menu Planning Guidelines for Long Day Care, Healthy Eating Advisory Service, Department of Health and Human Services, State Government of Victoria, 2012](#)

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- [Menu Planning Checklist for Family Day Care, Healthy Eating Advisory Service, Department of Health and Human Services, State Government of Victoria, 2013](#)
- [DET Safe Food Handling](#)
- [NHMRC Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services](#)
- [Food Safety Standards](#)
- [ACECQA Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011](#)

Related service policies (examples)

- Staff Health and Wellbeing
- [Food Safety policy](#)
- [Safety - bottle preparation](#)
- [Anaphylaxis policy](#)

Monitoring and review

This Healthy Eating and Oral Health Policy will be monitored and reviewed by educators, staff, families, management and the health and wellbeing team at least once every three years. ***Once every two years recommended for Smiles 4 Miles services.**

Reviewed: October 2023

Review Date: October 2025