

Mealtimes in Daycare

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A major part of the day in childcare for children involves routines. Of all the routines that are important to children, mealtimes play a vital role in developing children's skills in social, cognitive, language and physical development.

Creating a positive environment during meal times allows services the opportunity to instil in young children good nutritional attitudes which will last a life time.

Good nutrition and practices in day care services is important as it helps to create a lifetime of good eating habits and will ensure that children receive the vital nutrients needed for growth and development.

Mealtimes form a large part of the program and should be planned for as much as any other part of the day. The learning potential in this area is important and requires consideration. In some ways mealtimes can be used to meet children's individual needs and challenges.

Creating positive learning experiences through mealtimes cannot be done in isolation. A holistic approach is needed and includes the support and commitment of all stakeholders within the day care setting

Suggested Strategies

Each childcare service will be different and each child has individual needs. It is important to exchange information with the parents, Let them know what is important for mealtimes while children are in your care. Healthy nutritious and meaningful mealtime experiences are achieved by staff, families and children working together.

The following strategies are just some examples which may be applied to support the development of positive mealtime experiences for both staff and children.

- Reassess your services policy on mealtimes, food and nutrition and what can and can't be included in the lunch box.
- Ensure parents know what your service regards as inappropriate food and are not to be provided in lunch boxes and will be given to the child at the end of the day at going home time.
- Develop a plan that will promote and support a healthy approach to meals and mealtimes.
- Create specific rules to implement when children arrive at the service with inappropriate food in their hand e.g. greet the child, acknowledge that they have some special food to eat and encourage a routine of placing the treat in a special place in the kitchen to have when they are going home.
- Create interesting activities regarding good food with the children which not only assists children's development in self care but also can be used to support other developmental skills such as classification, mathematics, language and social skills.
- Provide posters, printed information for all staff and parents on healthy nutrition, mealtime routines and healthy lunch boxes.

- Encourage staff to eat with children providing modelling of healthy eating habits and appropriate social behaviour. Staff who sit and eat with children create excellent conversation opportunities as well as keeping children on task to finish their meal
- Provide information to parents on enrolment regarding policies for nutrition, mealtime routines, lunch box contents etc. accepted by the service. Lunch box guidelines which include acceptable food and suggestions for meeting a child's nutritional need may assist the busy parents and create a working relationship between the family and staff.

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