



Mealtime Rituals Procedure

Policy

The Mealtime Rituals Procedure falls under the Food Safety Policy. Hawthorn Early Years (HEY) will take all reasonable precautions to reduce potential hazards and harm to children attending the Service. This will be achieved through the implementation of health and hygiene procedures, including safe practices for handling, preparing, storing and serving food and drinks.

Application of Procedure

This procedure applies to the Approved Provider, the Board of Hawthorn Early Years, employees, students, volunteers, families, children and others attending the programs and activities of Hawthorn Early Years.

Definitions

Rhythms create a flow and structure throughout the day that helps ease children through different experiences, transitioning them between play, eating and resting.

Rituals are a normal part of childhood, and they play an important role in children's overall development. **Rituals** create order for children as they grow and try to make sense of the world around them. For example, a bath, story time, and cuddles every night before bed give children structure and a sense of security.

Hawthorn Early Years is committed to:

Ensuring mealtime rhythms and rituals are enjoyable experiences that support the health and wellbeing of the children participating. Our goal is to create a relaxed atmosphere at mealtimes where children have enough time to eat and enjoy their food as well as enjoy the social interactions with educators and other children. We understand that children who learn to eat well can develop and sustain a healthy lifestyle, which has many benefits such as healthy growth and development and preventing long term illness.

Hawthorn Early Years will:

Ensure training and support is provided to educators to support the effective application of this procedure.

Provide appropriately sized furniture, cutlery and other resources to support the implementation of calm and enjoyable meal times where children are involved from start to finish.



All employees, volunteers and students will:

Facilitate **progressive morning and afternoon tea routines** in small groups where children are invited and encouraged to participate when hungry.

Facilitate **lunch time** rituals giving children some choice in when they eat. Lunch time rituals will look different throughout the Service in line with children's ages and stages of development and the wider needs of the group. The rituals will be responsive to the individual needs of children and the whole group dynamic.

Engage children wholeheartedly in mealtime rituals to stimulate a deeper understanding of where food comes from, how it nourishes our bodies and the pleasure that can come from enjoying a meal alongside others to help develop healthy, and life-long eating habits. This will be done by:

1. Being present

Educators are to make the time and effort to slow down, be fully present, and act mindfully during mealtimes.

Allow children to contribute to the preparation and presentation of mealtimes through having inviting and aesthetically pleasing eating spaces, such as choosing a centrepiece such as a candle or vase of flowers/herbs from the garden. It is important to have the room set up for meal times prior to starting to ensure everything needed is ready and available and to minimise any disruptions to the flow of the meal.

Providing some choice for children about when they eat (e.g. having more than one sitting). If children are immersed in play it is preferable to notice this and say "I can see you are really busy right now, would you prefer to come for lunch in 10 minutes/to the second sitting of lunch?" This prior warning that a mealtime is approaching and some flexibility with timing will support children to be more present in the moment and tune in and read their hunger signals.

Encourage a calm mealtime where one educator is sitting with the children to guide discussions and supervise rather than attending to tasks.

Encourage children to learn about the goodness of food through discussions and create an opportunity to learn about their culinary likes and dislikes.

2. Facilitating a healthy approach to eating

Children who eat healthy foods in their everyday lives can be more alert and interested in participating in experiences, which can improve their concentration and learning.

Eating habits are established from a young age, and often these habits are carried through to adulthood. Educators will help provide a healthy eating environment by:

- making mealtimes relaxed and comfortable



- sitting and eating with the children
- being positive about the healthy foods the children are eating
- encouraging all children to try new foods
- being a positive role model with the foods you eat
- teaching the children about healthy eating through discussions and learning about the physiological signs our body gives us when we are hungry and thirsty

3. Prioritising health and safety

The health and safety of children during mealtimes is always prioritised and this procedure is implemented in conjunction with the Food Safety and Food Service Procedure. This means always checking the Dietary Requirements of individual children before serving any food.

Serve children with individual dietary requirements first to minimise the risks of children being served or sitting down to food/drinks which may contain an allergen or are not allowed.

Mealtime Rituals with Infants

- Mealtimes for infants will vary according to their individual needs and home rhythms.
- Create an intimate experience where the infant has the adults close attention either one-one or in a small group.
- Infants not yet sitting will be fed on an educators lap.
- Read infant's cues – they will communicate when they are ready for another spoonful or if they have had enough.
- Move at the infants pace through the mealtime.
- Offer simple choices, e.g. two types of healthy food and different coloured bibs.
- Use flowers, fresh herbs or foliage from the garden to create an ascetically pleasing table.
- Prepare warm face cloths to use when the meal is finished.

Mealtime Rituals with Toddlers

- Encourage toddlers to participate by setting the tables in an ascetically pleasing way with a centrepiece such as flowers, herbs or foliage from the garden.
- Facilitate mealtimes as a small group of up to six children at a time. Toddlers enjoy the company and sociability of being with friends in small groups.
- Provide seating and equipment that is responsive to toddler's physical needs such as chairs they can safely and independently get on and off.
- Where possible, allow time for toddlers to serve themselves providing appropriate cutlery and small water jugs. Learning to pour their own drinks empowers them to practice and master these skills.
- After eating encourage toddlers to have a drink of water and swish the water in their mouth before swallowing to flush teeth clean (dental health).
- Involve toddlers in the clean-up – encourage them to help place used cutlery, bowls and cups into the designated containers which are at a suitable height to support success.



- Prepare warm face cloths and encourage toddlers to wash their own face and hands using a mirror.

Mealtime Rituals with Pre-schoolers

- Get creative: allow children to design the set-up of the tables using a selection of natural or precious ornaments, flowers, herbs or foliage from the garden to provide a sense of charm and character to the mealtime table.
- Offer opportunities for children to prepare vegetables, cut fruit or finish preparing their own meal (e.g. making their own sandwich). Cut fruit or herbs may be added to water jugs.
- Allow children to serve their own food and pour their own drinks to foster independence and for children to see themselves as strong and capable.
- After eating encourage children to have a drink of water and swish the water in their mouth before swallowing to flush teeth clean (dental health).
- Involve children in the clean-up – encourage them to help place used cutlery, bowls and cups into the designated containers which are at a suitable height to support success.
- Prepare warm face cloths and encourage children to wash their own face and hands using a mirror where needed.

A mealtime mantra

The use of a mealtime mantra may be a nice way to signify the start of each meal and the coming together of the group. Beginning the mealtime mantra once everyone is calm and settled will assist with mindful eating habits and support the digestive process.

We thank the land for our food (place hands, palms down on the table)

We thank the sky for our water (hands in a circular motion towards the sky, palms facing out)

And we thank the people who prepare and share this meal.

Parents/guardians will:

Partner with us to keep us informed of any relevant details about their child's eating habits and mealtime rituals to assist us with their care and education and support individual cultural practices.

See also:

1. Food Safety Policy
2. Hygiene Procedure
3. Anaphylaxis Procedure
4. Diabetes Procedure
5. Nutrition and Dietary Requirements Procedure
6. Food Safety & Food Service Procedure



7. Food Safety Plan

Reference: Loader, M., & Christie, T. (2017). Rituals: Making the everyday extraordinary in early childhood, Childspace Early Childhood Institute, New Zealand.