09.7 Prime times – Baby and toddler mealtimes

Feeding and mealtimes are key times in the day for being close and to promote security, as well as for exploration and learning. Redbridge Preschool understands the importance of a healthy balanced diet for young children. At each meal/snack time, a named person is responsible for checking that the food provided meets all requirements for each child.

Toddler mealtimes

- For the most part, older babies and toddlers who are feeding themselves have their meals in their space, with their key group and key person.
- Whilst eating, there should always be a member of staff in the room with a valid Paediatric First Aid certificate.
- **A member of staff should always be in sight and hearing of children when eating and sat facing them wherever possible so they can ensure that children are eating in a way to prevent choking and so they can prevent food sharing and be awre of any unexpected allergic reactions.**
- Staff who are eating with the children must role-model hygiene, healthy eating and best practice at all times, for example not drinking cans of fizzy drinks in front of the children.
- Food is brought to their room in serving dishes on a trolley.
- Staff arrange the table before toddlers sit down; there should be no waiting time.
- Toddlers' hands are wiped/washed clean before their meal.
- Key persons serve their children; they ask their children what they want; they do not put food on plates if the toddler indicates that they do not want it. Toddlers can get very upset if their detested food is put in front of them; they do not understand 'try a little bit' in the way an older child does.
- Toddlers are not discouraged from eating with their fingers; this exploration of their food with their hands is the beginning of self-feeding. When they have finished, they may wish to 'play' further with any remaining food. It is fine for them to get a bit messy; they, and their table can be cleaned afterwards.
- Toddlers are given time to eat at their own pace and are not hurried to fit in with adults' tasks and breaks.
- Mealtimes are relaxed opportunities for social interaction of babies and toddlers with their group and the adults who care for them. It is a time of sensory learning and learning skills, as well as for the fundamental satisfaction of being fed.

- To protect children with food allergies or specific dietary requirements, children are discouraged from sharing and swopping their food with one another.
- Information for parents is displayed on the parent's notice board, including:
    - Ten Steps for Healthy Toddlers https://infantandtoddlerforum.org/media/upload/pdf-downloads/HR_toddler_booklet_green.pdf
    - Daily menus including identification of any foods containing allergens