

Mealtime Expectations

Wilson Street Kindergarten

Families



Mealtime Expectation: Structure

Our mealtime environment provides children with predictable mealtime breaks that are consistent each day.

This can be practiced at home through:

- Providing children with a time and place to eat, at a similar time each day, however there is no pressure for the child to eat
- Schedule snacks and meals at least 2-3 hours apart. This allows enough time for your child to develop an appetite between snacks and meals.
- Monitor your child's consumption for safety (e.g. choking), allergy awareness or if you believe a referral is needed to a Paediatric service (e.g. occupational therapist, speech pathologist, dietitian).
- Children are encouraged to demonstrate independence through opening their own packaging, eating to their fullness, and preferencing the food order how they choose.

Mealtime Expectation: Trust

Children are trusted to eat to their own preference and fullness cues, free from prompting, pressure or encouragement to eat.

This can be practiced at home through:

- Mealtimes can be guided by Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility model. This means that you (adult/caregiver) is responsible for **what** food is provided, **when** the meal is provided, and **where** the meal is provided. Your child decides how much they want to eat and whether they want to eat anything at all.
- Trust your child to eat their food free from pressure, coercion or bribery.
- Trust your child to eat without positive reinforcement for eating, e.g. avoid the use of phrases like "well done for eating your lunch today."
- Your child will be able to eat foods in the order of their choice, free from judgement or direction, e.g. children can eat their snack foods before their sandwich.
- We discourage "lunchbox checking" in front of children. If there are concerns about their intake, this should be spoken about away from your child.

Mealtime Expectations

Wilson Street Kindergarten Families



Mealtime Expectation: Socialising

Our mealtimes are opportunities for children to come together to connect, socialise and be present with each other.

This can be practiced at home through:

- Allowing children to be talkative during mealtimes, share stories and take turns.
- Adults to role model and facilitate discussion. Conversations during mealtimes don't have to focus on the food itself. Redirection of child reactions and judgements of others food by using phrases like "lets not yuck someone else's yum."
- Instead of describing food as "healthy" or "unhealthy", "sometimes" or "everyday" (1, 2), or talking about nutrition, guide children to explore the food with their five senses. For example,
 - "The biscuit is crunchy"
 - "These raspberries are red, just like apples"
 - "The yoghurt has a big smell"

Mealtime Expectation: Food Learning

Our programming ensures children are provided with opportunities to inquire, learn and explore food concepts through developmentally appropriate food learning.

This can be practiced at home through:

- Food Learning and conversations about food for preschoolers should be kept simple, following your child's interest about food in a non judgmental way.
- Using the five senses when discussing food with children during mealtimes and within food learning. E.g "Can you hear the crunch sound in your ears when you chew a crunchy apple?"
- To support child agency, consider ways of setting up environments and routines that support children to make decisions e.g. ask the children to set the table, children can serve themselves, children can decide when they are full or hungry.

Mealtime Expectations

Wilson Street Kindergarten

Families



- Mealtimes will support children to learn about (3):
 - Their identity (I prefer certain foods. My family celebrates our culture with food.)
 - Relationships (When we sit for lunch, we share the milk. I like to sit next to my sibling so I can talk to them.)
 - Their community (We grow mint in our garden.)
 - Literacy (My name card has an 'A'. I can explain how to chop fruit.)
 - Numeracy (There are six people at our table. I can make a pattern with my peas.)
 - Their world (Pancakes are made from wheat. When I have food in my mouth I don't try and talk at the same time)

References:

1. Ares et al. (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuad072>
2. Australian Education Research Organisation (2023). [Play-based learning and intentionality](#)
3. ACECQA, Rhonda Livingstone (2019). <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/latest-news/blog/creating-positive-mealtimes>