

## Food and Nutrition Policy

TRACKS is a specialist early years setting for Autistic children aged 2.5 to 6 years. We do not provide cooked meals on the premises and a selection of snacks are provided during sessions. Children bring in packed lunches from home, with guidance shared with parents to encourage children to have healthier food choices in their lunch boxes. All packed lunches are checked for potential allergens so that the risk of cross contamination is reduced. We are a nut free setting.

Snack and mealtimes at TRACKS is a group activity within a distraction free environment. It is an opportunity to be alongside peers and where food is motivating, a crucial opportunity for communication. Children are supported by Keyworkers, first in hand washing then eating at the table. Where children are reluctant to sit a gym ball or a rocker may be provided as an alternative.

Many of our children have associated sensory difficulties; around textures, smells and getting messy. Eating habits from home are often well established, with many children having restrictive diets. Many of our children seek the sameness in their foods and the predictability that familiar 'safe' foods give.

Our aims of snack are for children to eat to maintain their regulation and health. A fruit option is always offered and all children are given the opportunity to choose from a range of predictable snack items. Over time a core of snack foods that our children are favoured and motivated to request has been developed : Ritz crackers, cheerios (dry cereal), raisins, breadsticks and small yoghurts. Alongside this all children are offered a cut up piece of fruit. Small amounts of food are given at one time to allow the opportunity to request "more". Safe and dry finger foods are offered and the opportunity for self feeding with a spoon is encouraged. High salt or sugar content foods are limited.

Foods are presented in clear boxes to allow the children the opportunity to request and have a level of autonomy.

Many of our children have restrictive diets and parents may send in approved snacks from home where needed.

We state that only water can be sent in from home. Each child arrives with a bottle provided from home that they can confidently drink from. Water or milk are offered in setting. Where children do not drink water a small amount of reduced sugar squash may be added.

### **Food from home:**

Where packed lunches and snacks are provided we ask that consideration is given to providing children with healthy, balanced and nutritious food where possible. Chocolate and sweets should not be included. We request that attention is paid to portion size and that sweet and salty foods are kept to a minimum. As a team we understand the need for children to have familiar foods and predictability in their lunch boxes alongside some degree of choice. Please communicate with keyworkers any additional support required with meal times. We suggest a maximum of 6 items in the lunch box and please keep portion sizes to what you would expect your child to eat.

We cannot reheat food on the premises and we ask for hot foods for lunches only to be provided in a thermos flask.

A packed lunch is only required for the longer sessions on a Monday and Tuesday.

On a Wednesday and Thursday for three hour sessions children will not require a meal. Each session will provide the opportunity for a snack alongside their peers as part of the class routine. Alternative arrangements can be made where there are medical needs at agreement with the Principal.

We are a nut free setting. This is communicated to all parents on registration.

Alongside snack time, messy play forms an essential part of exploring different textures, smells and acceptance of 'mess' on hands. Having the traces of 'mess' on their hands can cause some anxiety and we aim to build up their tolerance through graded exploration alongside a familiar adult.

Many of our children show signs of Pica and will seek out non edible food items to put in their mouths. Attention is paid to keeping the environment as safe as possible but sticks, some stones etc are unavoidable in the garden. All children are redirected to safe items and offered an alternative; which may include a chew toy, a bottle of drink, wet flannels or ice.

All children with a food intolerance will be catered for once parents have completed details of this on the application form. A photograph of the child and their dietary requirements is displayed in both the kitchen and the classroom. We ask parents to provide suitable snacks for their child.

Children who have a diagnosed food allergy will complete a Health care plan prior to their child starting at the setting. The Health Care Plan will clearly state the steps to take to prevent a reaction and steps to take in treating this. Any medication needs to be kept at TRACKS in a clear named box in the office alongside the complete Health care plan. Whenever medication is administered this is recorded and passed onto parents or medics. Where a child has a food allergy this will be shared with all parents and staff to ensure that these foods are not present in the setting. Again a photograph and all details are clearly displayed in both the classroom and kitchen.

The government guidance on excluding food items from a child's diet is "It is important not to exclude foods from a child's diet without a valid reason as this can result in an unnecessarily restricted diet, which could have a negative impact on nutrition".

As part of the curriculum children will have the opportunity to explore food in their play, through stories, messy play and arts and crafts. Staff will model tasting foods and provide emotional support and encouragement.

We are very happy to celebrate special events in the children's lives. If parents / carers feel they would like to send in something to share with the class i.e. cake, please ensure that all contents are clearly named and it is nut free.

**Why this guidance is important:**

Providing healthy, balanced and nutritious foods ensures that children:

Get the right amount of nutrients and energy they need while they are growing.

They develop positive eating habits early on.



Policy Adopted By:- HOWARD BRYANT

Position:- CHAIR

Date:- 31 / 12 / 2025

Signed:- 