



Listening and responding to young children's views on food

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Introduction

Establishing links between food and learning supports the holistic philosophy of early years practitioners. In addition, listening to young children is a core function of working with children and supporting their development and understanding. For young children, life isn't separated into education and care, or mealtimes and learning times – life is a seamless whole.

We know from research undertaken by Mooney and Blackburn (2003) that some children under five in childcare would like more choice of food and suggested having a menu. Mooney and Blackburn go on to report that the children 'were very pleased that they were being consulted for the study and wanted a greater say in making rules and the choice of food and activities that the setting offered'. This is echoed in Standard 3 of the *National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services*, which states:

Children and young people and families receive high quality services which are co-ordinated around their individual and family needs and take account of their views.

(Department of Health 2004b)

Practitioners have an important role in listening to children and helping them learn through example. This is particularly true for social activities

such as eating. Wherever children are in society, whatever they see, they will learn something from their experiences. As adults, we have the opportunity to help children understand the world around them and offer them healthy choices in partnership with their families.

In 2006 the Department of Health released alarming figures that 29.7 per cent of children and young people

YOUNG CHILDREN'S VOICES NETWORK (YCVN)

Young Children's Voices Network is a national project promoting listening within the early years. The network supports local authorities in developing good practice in listening to young children, so that young children's views may inform policy and improve early childhood services. Local authorities across the country have established local networks that focus on developing a listening culture. These networks support practitioners by offering opportunities to share effective practice, providing training and undertaking projects.

LISTENING

In this leaflet, listening is defined as:

- an active process of receiving (hearing and observing), interpreting and responding to communication. It includes all the senses and emotions and is not limited to the spoken word
- a necessary stage in ensuring the participation of all young children, as well as parents and staff, in matters that affect them
- an ongoing part of tuning in to all young children as individuals in their everyday lives
- sometimes part of a specific consultation about a particular entitlement, choice, event or opportunity.

Understanding listening in this way is key to providing an environment in which all young children feel confident, safe and powerful, ensuring they have the time and space to express themselves in whatever form suits them.

aged two to 15 were classed as overweight or obese. Figures for boys and girls among this age group were 30.6 per cent and 28.7 per cent respectively, and 17.3 per cent of boys and 14.7 per cent of girls were obese. The majority of children have intakes of saturated fat, sugar and salt

which far exceed the maximum dietary levels of adults (Food Standards Agency 2000). Thus, it is important that we listen to children to learn how we can help them to eat a healthier diet.

Case study: Conversation – the perfect condiment for a meal

On a warm spring morning in 2004 I took a flight to Rome. The city bustled with noise as I waited for a train that would take me a short distance into the country. The Casa del Zianda nursery was larger than I imagined and classically Italian with pink washed walls and dark wooden shutters. Amidst shady trees children sat giggling. I entered the nursery piazza and behind the shade of white stone pillars saw a long rectangular table at which the children would sit for their lunch.

My study set out to establish what these children would experience during their lunchtime together and to compare this with a similar nursery in the UK. I met children during the morning whilst they were hoisting sand in a bucket over a low tree branch. It had been explained to them that I would be present during the day and they were able to talk and become friendly with me, ascertaining why I would be making notes at lunchtime. They seemed happy and relaxed.

The Italian nursery teacher explained that whether the lunchtime food is modest or substantial, the preparation and consumption is the focal point and mirrors the Italian way of life. She said, 'Eating is an art, we relish every mouthful; we eat proper meals which are nutritious yet a sensory delight. Children can help to prepare some of the lunch and to choose the menu together; this helps them to develop good relationships with each other, to relax and participate in an enjoyable experience in which they are integral.'

In this school it is considered that mealtimes are an extension of the Italian way of life; therefore eating is both an activity to be enjoyed and a passion. Conversation is considered the perfect condiment to the meal. Children discussed choosing fruit and vegetables at the local market and laughed at the way their parents sniff and squeeze fruit to ensure suitability. Both boys and girls initiated lively conversation about what foods they enjoyed eating. The teacher explained, 'We take our time choosing a menu; we choose ingredients that induce excitement and discuss these with the children.'

The Italian children constantly interacted with each other and with the adults who sat amongst them. Their learning was acquired and constructed through interactive processes and developmentally appropriate first-hand and meaningful experiences, such as choosing

and discussing the menu, passing plates of food, using a child-sized parmesan grater and pouring from jugs of water. Whilst acquiring social skills, children enjoyed the art of language making, listening and communication. They were motivated to develop good relationships with their peers and staff, fuelled by the relaxed and enjoyable mealtime together. Therefore, they ate well.

In the UK setting I visited, the nursery staff considered mealtimes as part of the curriculum. Many of the children did not eat with their family on a regular basis, therefore lunchtimes were seen as important opportunities for socialisation and learning to eat at the table with others. Staff also used lunchtimes to develop mathematical skills. Staff encouraged the children to help lay the table and calculate how many plates and cups were needed in relation to numbers of children.

My observations suggest that the Italian children's lunchtimes were used as an extension of their culture, and expectations for children to spend an hour at the table were considered normal. Whereas in the UK, lunchtimes were considered useful to encourage socialisation, language and mathematical skills, and to compensate for a potential lack of family mealtimes together at home; the expectation was that children would have had enough of sitting at the table after 30 minutes.

Behaviour was good in both settings as children received positive role modelling by adults sharing and taking turns. Language was relaxed, but direct questioning to draw some children out in the UK setting did not always encourage those not inclined or able to converse. Conversation tended to be with those children who demonstrated more confidence. In Italy, teachers talked about themselves to start conversation and explained their own thoughts, and children responded in a more relaxed way by following on with their ideas.

This case study shows that lunchtimes can provide a very rich learning environment that, if well organised and planned appropriately, encourage children to respond with more enthusiasm to eating and meal socialisation.

Source: Margaret Travers, nursery teacher and early years trainer and inspector

Case study: Listening to children about food

Life at the Children's House Nursery, North East Lincolnshire involves continually and very actively listening to children. This ethos is intrinsic to the way we work so that children perceive themselves as, and are active in, playing a formative role in decision making. This includes children's views on food.

Our nursery prides itself on sourcing organic and non-GM food wherever possible, as well as supporting local farmers and producers. Our menus are informed by advice from the Caroline Walker Trust and mealtimes are a relaxed, social occasion, and an opportunity to share a meal and conversation. But perhaps most importantly, the nursery children's views of food shape our menus, our food buying and the role food plays in the life of the nursery.

We make displays of fresh fruit and vegetables, including more unusual types; run tasting sessions; and have discussions with our foundation stage aged children about healthy balanced diets and how our bodies benefit from each food type. We visited the local supermarket and the children chose food for the tasting – and even used the barcode scanner on the till!

We established a café in our role-play area. The children set tables and decorated the café with appropriate signs. The menus were on laminated cards and had pictures of and writing about food. The children made meals from photographs – cut from cookery magazines and then glued on paper plates – and served each other meals. They also made food out of dough and served it to each other.

The staff observed children closely through this role-play and made notes, used video recorders and engaged the children in discussions about their likes and dislikes. There was a great discussion about when, where and with whom children eat at home. Interestingly, popular lunches at nursery, such as tuna pasta, formed a large part of the children's conversations, and it reinforced our knowledge and understanding of children's preferences.

Taking these 'food favourites' as well as attitudes to less popular food, staff produced notes that were used in our menu planning. Working with our cooks, we then produce menus which are nutritionally balanced as well as responsive to the children's views.

Source: The Children's House, Stallingborough

Boundaries of options

There must, of course, be a balance between listening to children's views on food and what practitioners can then offer. Boundaries are important so children can understand that their favourite food, which may be chips or something 'unhealthy' is not on offer, but a range of healthier items is. Providing options for young children allows them to develop the skills to make choices within an acceptable range. Offering children a piece of fruit of their choice is easier if they have the information about which fruits are available – as with adults, choices are easier with a menu.

This leaflet builds on the approaches discussed in the rest of the *Listening as a way of life* series and provides suggestions about how adults can help young children to learn and make decisions about healthy lifestyles, and how food can be used to help children understand about the world around them. It includes examples of effective practice that is being undertaken in this area.

Building relationships

A recently published volume on the work of the educationist Magda Gerber describes some of the ways in which even the youngest babies can be listened to and have their needs and views taken into account in early

years settings. Gerber was a follower of the Hungarian paediatrician Emmi Pikler and, when she moved to the United States, she created an organization called Resources for Infant Educators (RIE). Through RIE she developed her approach to child rearing, which is based on respect for the growing competence of young children and an understanding of their ability and need to be both 'independent of' and 'interdependent with' their carers. The following short extract from *Authentic Relationships in Group Care for Infants and Toddlers* (Petrie and Owen 2005) describes a very young child's mealtime, and throws light on ways of listening to babies about their experiences of food within the RIE philosophy, in particular the way that children are encouraged to eat at a time which is right for them:

The child's sense of self begins to emerge during this kind of caring routine. During meaningful interactions the child may attempt to engage the adult in a playful exchange, similar to teasing. This can become an opportunity for the child to learn to negotiate if the adult joins in the play. Adults who are focused on the task rather than the relationship feel rushed and often miss the child's attempt to engage them.

The same opportunity for building relationships exists in the feeding and mealtimes. While most programs require infants to be held when they are given their

bottles, many do not provide the same closeness when the child is older. I often see children propped in a high chair and left with finger food on the tray. They are expected to eat alone while the caregiver is busy elsewhere. Mealtime is not valued as an opportunity to develop relationships and social skills.

A small table where the child can sit without being propped up is the ideal setting to support this stage of development. Interactions during the meals are enjoyable and help to develop language. In the beginning a caregiver may choose to feed and focus on one child at the table while the others play near by, but later two or more children can come to the table together. When the caregiver remains at the table, actively engaged and responsive, the experience becomes more than just getting fed.

When the mealtime is pleasant the child feels secure and competent. This feeling of competency is demonstrated in many ways – using the spoon to serve themselves from the serving bowl, wiping up spills or pouring their own milk from a small pitcher.

When visitors see our pre-toddlers pouring their own milk they are often surprised. They want to know how we taught them to do that. We don't teach pre-toddlers to pour their own milk; we allow them to pour it because they can.

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Specific dietary requirements

It is important to be aware that some children have specific dietary needs. There may be health factors, such as diabetes, as well as children who have allergies to particular ingredients. There are also cultural and religious factors influencing children's food requirements, for example, Kosher and Halal meat and vegetarianism. In addition, for various personal reasons or beliefs, families may have specific requirements for not eating meat, fish or other animal products. Practitioners need to respect and accommodate the variety of dietary needs of children by ensuring all children and parents are listened to.

Equality and diversity

We have a responsibility to tackle some of the prejudices that exist in working with children and their families as partners. Food practices can be a place to discover underlying prejudices. In the following section we discuss how we can use food as part of a wider equalities programme and how it can be used to help children to share in and enjoy the various foods that are often available in our diverse society.

Food can be an exciting and rewarding tool for practitioners to use to enable children to learn more about

the world we live in. It can help them to better understand and appreciate the lives of people who live in our society who are different from themselves.

But learning about the food eaten by people from cultures different from our own does not automatically mean that we value and respect them more. To be able to respect and truly value others will often take more than simply liking their food or admiring their cooking skills. It may require deeper underlying prejudices to be addressed. So, although it is important for children to learn about and appreciate the food that people from various cultures eat in order to know more about their lives, it is only a part of learning to respect people equally.

What do we know about children and their attitudes to food?

The food that children eat and like will reflect their family and cultural backgrounds. So some children will be unfamiliar with the food eaten by others. Acknowledging the food eaten by each child helps them to feel they belong. Learning about unfamiliar food may also help them to respect and value diversity. In thinking about how we can use food to help children to value this diversity, we need to:

- recognise and understand how and why children may be prejudiced against, and make stereotypical assumptions about, people who are different from themselves and, consequently, may see the food they eat as inferior to their own
- give positive messages about differences in order to undermine these assumptions, as well as providing opportunities for them to unlearn any negative attitudes that they may have learnt.

This means, as adults, that we all need to be aware of our own attitudes to the variety of foods in our lives and to the people who may eat different food from ourselves.

The varieties of foods and their part in our lives

In starting to think about foods and what they mean in our lives, we realise how great the variety is – worldwide and in our own society. We only have to go to a Greek, African, Caribbean, Chinese, South American, Polish or an Indian shop to see the extent of variety. Some of us may find unfamiliar foods exciting. Others may not wish to try new food. We may make assumptions, perhaps unconsciously, based on stereotypes about what things taste like. Such stereotypes may spill over into assumptions about people themselves. If we are serious about wanting children to value the variety of food available in our country, we need to help them to value the various people living here as well.

Considerations for projects on listening to children about food

It is exciting for children to visit shops and markets and helps in their learning about different foods and discussions about them. But we need to prepare ourselves as to what might be said or happen. Supposing a child says, 'Poo, this shop stinks!' Or, 'Yuk, I don't want to eat that.' Or they whisper and giggle together about what they are seeing. Not only do the children need to be prepared before the visit about the foods they may see, but also that they are respectful of the shopkeeper and what he or she is selling. This means that practitioners need to think about any project beforehand.

Thinking about some key principles involved in planning projects about the diversity of food ensures that work on food is part of an overall ongoing strategy about inclusion and equality. It is only when all children feel they belong – within a positive and welcoming ethos – that they will feel free to disclose information, share their thoughts and discuss their own culture happily and confidently.

Food for thought

- Prepare and plan every project carefully, in advance, with all other workers and family members so they all 'own' it.
- Ensure that there is equal respect and value given to familiar and unfamiliar foods, the places where they are produced and the people who produce them.
- Be a positive model for children in trying unfamiliar food and be enthusiastic about the experience. A practitioner's reaction to a particular food may influence how a child perceives it.
- Check out any proposed place to visit in advance and explain the purpose and discuss it with anyone involved.
- Ensure that the various places where food is eaten – outside, inside, at tables, on knees, on the floor with a cloth – are equally valued according to the climate, particular circumstances and traditions.
- Ensure that the various ways food is eaten – using chopsticks, cutlery, fingers, some pliable material to scoop (chapattis/rotis, leaves) – are equally valued, and recognise that all need skills and confidence and are appropriate to the particular cultural, historical and dietary family patterns. No way is 'better' than another and it can be fun for children to learn these different methods from each other.
- Consider what children and their family members might say or do and plan for all eventualities in advance.

In meeting children's individual needs, we need to know:

- about religious or dietary requirements – Halal and Kosher, no animal products (vegetarian/vegan), keeping cooking pots and cutlery separate, not mixing specific dietary foods together
- of any cultural or religious celebrations and periods of fasting (Lent, Ramadan), special washing facilities
- about the variety of ways of preparing the same food – for example, making tea and bread.

We need to take specific care to:

- avoid using negative associations of words to describe foods (smelly, funny, foreign) – the phrase 'ethnic food' is usually used to mean food that is eaten by people from minority ethnic groups – this is incorrect as everyone has an ethnicity
- avoid using words such as 'normal' to describe what the majority of children eat
- recognise that children may be reluctant or ashamed to talk about what they eat at home for fear of being ridiculed, unless they feel truly included in the setting
- not make assumptions about what children eat at home – Asian families may eat fish and chips, all children may have curry takeaways.

Food for fun

How might we begin, or continue, to celebrate the diversity of food in positive and practical ways?

- Inform ourselves about the varieties of food available in our local community. Make a trip to a local town or, in remote rural areas, seek information from catalogues, recipes and the internet.
- Include a project on a wide range of foods as part of an ongoing programme of addressing inequalities with children.
- Visit shops and markets, talk with the owners, find out the names of unfamiliar fruits and vegetables, how they are used and prepared, examine the tins, packets and jars of food, look at the various language scripts on the labels and find out what they are.
- Talk with children about what they eat at home, every day and on special occasions, being careful not to pry or make assumptions based on their culture.
- Acquire a variety of foods, talk about them together and discuss and describe colours, textures, sheens, smells and tastes and how they are prepared. Compare similarities and differences.

- Wherever possible regularly provide a variety of food at mealtimes and snacks, reflecting the variety of cultures in our society, encouraging children to try it and talk together about it while they are eating.
- In areas which are remote from shops that stock a variety of food, use photographs and models of food. Ask children to find out what members of their extended families eat, and ate in the past, and plot a 'family food tree'.
- Many nurseries have an 'Asian' or 'Polish' shop somewhere in their area that they could arrange to visit. For those areas where such shops are too far away, practitioners could set up a 'pretend' shop, making sure that they have researched the issues beforehand.
- Growing food with children – in a local allotment, the nursery garden, or even on the windowsill – can be a great way to learn about how plants grow from a seed and become the lunch on their plate.

A critical part of the process of learning to respect and value people, promoting racial equality and celebrating diversity, is to help children to unlearn negative attitudes about people different from themselves – whether the attitudes are based on culture, ethnicity, skin colour, physical features, religion, language or the food they eat. So talking about diversity alone is not the same as talking about equality. And the task of celebrating diversity is wider than addressing issues of food, important though that is. It is just a part of a strategic approach to ensuring racial equality.

Implementing change

Implementing change takes time and effort. In their book *The Nursery Food Book*, Whiting and Lobstein (1992) suggest some tips to keep in mind:

- make changes slowly and unobtrusively – one change at a time

- accustom children to a wide range of choices early on
- be seen to eat it yourself with obvious pleasure
- create fun activities involving food.

While working with children on activities involving food, you can find out what it is they think about food by listening to them through documenting their reactions and their discussions and reflecting on the information gathered. This can lead to sources of knowledge that can help you change your practice. Their other suggestions include:

- explain why you are making changes and how children's suggestions have been used to make changes
- be absolutely positive in your approach.

Working with babies

Further explanation of the RIE philosophy from Petrie and Owen (2005) shows that during care activities (nappy changing, feeding, bathing, dressing and so on) practitioners 'encourage even the tiniest infant to become an active participant rather than a passive recipient of the activities.'

This extract from 'The RIE Early Years "Curriculum"' by Ruth Money (2005) shows how we can support children in regulating how much they eat:

... the infant's self-initiation is incorporated in the care-giving interaction of feeding. The caregiver is in control of offering healthy food. She offers the bottle when the infant shows signs of hunger, and stops when he signals that he has had enough. In an older infant, she sits with him and offers a plate of very tiny servings. She feeds him and also allows him to feed himself simultaneously. She talks to him about what he is eating, asks if he wants more when a food is gone from his plate, and serves him a small amount more

Case study: Don't eat with your fingers – it's rude!

It is important that children develop the skills to use cutlery, but we also need to be aware of saying to children things like, 'Don't eat with your fingers – it's rude!', which implies that they are behaving badly when it may be the traditional way of eating in their families. Apart from the negative message that such a comment might give to other children, it indicates a failure to understand the variety of ways of eating and demeans the home experiences of the child concerned. It is important to recognise the dexterity needed to pick up food from a plate, roll it along the fingers to the

fingertips and guide it to the mouth, or to use a roti or chapati to scoop food. Such a remark also ignores that most people eat things like cake and crisps with their fingers. Encouraging children who eat with their fingers to demonstrate these skills to others (for example, in eating rice, dhal and gravy) and getting them to copy how they do it, will help the recognition of how difficult it is to do it without making a mess.

Such sharing of skills can help remove notions of cultural superiority and introduce feelings of admiration instead.

only as he asks for it. In this way he is helped to learn to self regulate his eating. This is also the procedure when a group of four young toddlers start having meals together at the same table.

Possibilities and challenges

One of the key challenges to be tackled is educating children about food: what it does to your body; how eating healthily can improve your well-being; and which foods are good for you and which are not. The early years are the perfect time for children to start learning this kind of

information, as well as having the chance to enjoy and celebrate food. The lifestyles which they develop as a result may prove to be a valuable foundation for combating obesity, not only in childhood but throughout their lives.

Evidence from the Food Standards Agency report on the effects of food promotion to children (2003) concludes that food promotion definitely affects children's food preferences, purchase behaviour and consumption. It is also evident that younger children in particular do not understand the purposes of advertising, with some unable to distinguish between advertisements and entertainment. Since 2006, The Kid's Food Campaign has called for an end

Case study: There's far more in this than just 'food'!

The manager of Freshfield Nursery, Mrs Quinton, heard one four-year-old child refer to rice at lunchtime as 'chinky food'. Although she was already in the process of developing a strategy for racial equality in the nursery, this particular incident gave her the impetus to rethink her work on food. She decided to give a group of children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds the experience of learning about the foods eaten in their local community. She hoped that this would enable them to understand each other's lives better. She identified two local shops that sell foods different from one another – one owned by Mrs Elliott and the other by Mr Shah.

Mrs Elliott's shop catered for the 'traditional English' community and Mr Shah's shop catered for people from Asia, the Caribbean, Greece and Somalia. Mrs Quinton visited both shopkeepers in advance and discussed with them the reasons for wanting to arrange a visit, asking them whether they would welcome such a visit and perhaps discuss the food with the children. She explained that there would be both black and white children and that they might ask uncomfortable questions. She assured them that she would prepare the children beforehand. Both shopkeepers readily agreed.

Mrs Quinton spent time examining everything, finding out correct names (in English and Punjabi) and reading labels (in Arabic, Greek, English, Spanish, Italian and Punjabi) so she became familiar with the stock. Mr Shah gave her a copy of his order form with the names of foods from all over the world.

Mrs Quinton then prepared the children for the visit. They spent time over four weeks looking at and talking about pictures of foods, learning some of the names of those they did not know, what they were used for and how they might be eaten or prepared, the scripts they might see on tins and packages and understanding that they might hear unfamiliar languages spoken. She invited family members to come to the nursery to talk about food generally. Mrs Quinton encouraged the children to greet the shopkeepers by saying 'hello' and

'goodbye'. She found that two of the Pakistani boys had never been in an 'English' shop and hardly any of the white children had been in an 'Asian' shop. She used circle time and Persona Dolls to share ideas about what respecting things that are different means and how we can try to understand and learn about them. Mrs Quinton decided that talking about different religious practices was unlikely to be relevant during the visit but prepared herself for any questions that the children might ask, for example about Halal meat, alcohol and ham.

The children were very excited about the visits and initially were overawed. The enthusiasm with which they talked to one another about things with which they were familiar showed their self-confidence and demonstrated their pride in the food of their own culture and a growing respect for the cultures of the others. They found there were pickles, fruit and vegetables in both shops (but some were different sorts) and there were things in each which some children had never seen before – huge bags of rice and chicken on a spit. In Mrs Elliott's shop the children said 'hello' and 'goodbye' in English. In Mr Shah's shop the Pakistani children greeted him in Punjabi and the others in English.

Both visits proved highly successful with the children. The next day they talked about the visit and represented what they had seen and done in many different ways. Together with Mrs Quinton they wrote to both shopkeepers to thank them for giving them a good time and drew pictures for them of what they remembered. The children prepared a short story about their visit to share with other children who had not been on the visit – who asked if they, too, could visit the shops. Several children asked if they could try some unfamiliar foods at lunchtime. Everything seemed to lead to something else. The whole experience had a domino effect, reverberating over all aspects of the nursery and setting off a train of activities that eventually became part of routine practice. Mrs Quinton realised that there was far more in this than just 'food'!

to irresponsible marketing of foods high in sugar, salt and fat and challenges manufacturers who use underhand marketing methods to sell unhealthy food to children.

After significant lobbying work conducted in the children's sector to ban such advertising, measures are being taken to protect children from exposure to unhealthy media messages: 'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives' Cross-Government Strategy for England (2008) proposes a Healthy Food Code of Good Practice for England's food industry. The aim of this strategy is to reduce the proportion of overweight and obese children to the level of those in 2000 by the end of 2010 and to halt the year-on-year rise in obesity among children.

According to the above publication, a third of children are currently obese or overweight and the government Office for Science's Foresight programme suggests that without action, this will rise to two-thirds of all children by 2050. This statistic is alarming but not final. Those of us who work with children and families have the opportunity to support a new approach to eating and understanding food. We have the chance to make the above statement a threat rather than a reality through supporting young children to explore healthy options before their patterns of eating become too fixed. The government is beginning to tackle this issue and the 'be healthy' outcome from the government's Change for Children agenda is a lever which we can use to adopt a new way of working with children on food issues. Early years and children's services will have an important role in supporting 'healthy weight and healthy lives' through the provision of information on child health to parents during pregnancy and the child's first years of life.

Children's voices in policy and practice

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has a right to be heard in the development of policy and practice that affects them. However, there are difficulties in using young children's views beyond the remit of the service. While it is important that government and those organisations lobbying on behalf of children listen to what children say, children should not be overloaded nor at this young age be presented with numerous strangers asking questions. Young children's views can be better understood and represented by those who know them best; as David and Powell (1999) confirm 'observations by those who know children well are more likely to be infused with a more intimate understanding of the meanings the child attributes to particular behaviours and events'.

Early Years Foundation Stage Safeguarding and promoting children's welfare

Specific legal requirements – food and drink

- Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious. Those responsible for the preparation and handling of food must be competent to do so.
- Fresh drinking water must be available at all times.
- Registered providers must notify Ofsted of any food poisoning affecting two or more children looked after on the premises. Notification must be made as soon as is reasonably practicable, but in any event within 14 days of the incident occurring. A registered provider who, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with this requirement, commits an offence.

Statutory guidance to which providers should have regard

- Providers should obtain, record and act on information from parents about a child's dietary needs.
- Providers should be aware of their responsibilities under food hygiene legislation including registration with the relevant Local Authority Environmental Health Department.
- In group provision, food hygiene matters should be included in induction and on-the-job training, which is available to all staff involved in the preparation and handling of food.
- If parents provide packed lunches, providers should inform them about what can be stored safely and about appropriate food content.

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Further reading

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Reflection space

How do you use food to celebrate difference and promote healthy eating with young children?

This page is for you to use to jot down ideas for making the most of every day opportunities within your setting

**How would you like meal times to run in your setting?
Consider atmosphere/layout/interaction.**

What steps do you need to take to achieve this?

How are young children involved in making decisions about the food they eat?

How can you offer healthy options and encourage positive choices around food?

In what ways can you enable all young children to celebrate difference using food as a starting point?

How will families be involved?

How do food practices fit into your inclusion and equality processes?

Useful websites

www.ncb.org.uk/ycvn

Young Children's Voices Network (YCVN) is a national project promoting listening within the early years. The network supports local authorities in developing good practice in listening to young children, so that young children's views may inform policy and improve early childhood services. Practice development, consultancy, networking opportunities and resources are available.

www.ncb.org.uk/ecu

The Early Childhood Unit (ECU) is based at NCB and provides information on specific topics within early years care and education. ECU has networks and projects which aim to improve services and support workforce development.

www.ncb.org.uk

NCB promotes the interests and wellbeing of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives. NCB advocates the participation of children and young people in all matters affecting them and challenges disadvantage in childhood.

www.food.gov.uk

The Food Standards Agency is an independent food safety watchdog set up by an Act of Parliament in 2000 to protect the public's health and consumer interests in relation to food.

www.cwt.org.uk

The Caroline Walker Trust has a number of publications including *Eating well for under-5s in childcare*. The second edition of *Eating well for under 5s in child care* sets out new evidence for the importance of eating well for under 5s and provides a more detailed and updated rationale for nutrient based standards for this sector.

www.gardenorganic.org.uk/organicgardening/schools.php

A website that promotes organic gardening in schools and nurseries.

www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodcampaign

The Children's Food Campaign aims to improve young people's health and well-being through better food and by protecting children from food marketing.

www.pre-school.org.uk/food

Information about PLA's Feeding Young Imaginations project, designed to provide parents and carers of young children with guidance and practical tips to make healthy eating fun.

www.participationworks.org.uk

Participation Works is a partnership of six national children and young people's agencies. It enables organisations to effectively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives. The site contains an Early Years Room with specific information on listening to young children, developed by the Early Childhood Unit at NCB.

www.crae.org.uk

Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) protects the human rights of children by lobbying and raising awareness. CRAE also publishes an annual review of the state of children's rights in England.

Listening as a way of life

This leaflet is one of six leaflets from the government funded project 'Listening as a way of life'. The series provides guidance to practitioners in designing creative and individual ways of listening to children and to each other.

Others in the series include:

Why and how we listen to young children

Listening to babies

Listening to young disabled children

Supporting parents and carers to listen: A guide for practitioners

Are equalities an issue? Finding out what young children think

There is a second series of leaflets also available:

Developing a listening culture

Leadership for listening

For copies contact the Early Childhood Unit by email on ecu@ncb.org.uk, or call the switchboard on 020 7843 6000 and ask for the Early Childhood Unit.

STATUTORY GUIDANCE

The requirement under section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006 states that LAs must have regard to any information about the views of young children which is available and relevant to those duties. For services to be successful, the voices of young children need to be listened to and actively taken into account. Children need to be recognised as 'partners' in the planning and commissioning of services. By regularly listening to young children, local partnerships can respond to children's needs, identify barriers to learning and development, and ultimately work towards improving services for children and supporting children to achieve their potential.

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