Little Disciples Childcare

Healthy Eating, Food & Snack Policy

"Caring for children, supporting parents and sparking imaginations. Where quality, affordability and excitement meet!"

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1.0	September 2023	Initial Release for Provider changes	S. Gocher	A. Stephens	Annually – September 2024
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3.0	November 2026	Major policy amendments in line with good practice.	S. Gocher	A. Stephens	Annually – November 2027

Policy Statement
At Little Disciples Childcare, we are committed to providing a seamless and cohesive approach to childcare across all our services. This policy and procedure apply equally to both our Nursery Plus provision and our Breakfast, Afterschool and Holiday Club services. This integrated framework ensures consistent standards of care, safety and quality across all aspects of our provision, fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for every child in our care.

Little Disciples Childcare

Healthy Eating, Food and Nutrition Policy

1. Introduction

Little Disciples Childcare is committed to promoting the health, safety and well-being of all children in our care by providing and encouraging healthy, balanced and nutritious food and drinks.

We recognise that good nutrition is essential for children's growth, development, concentration, emotional well-being and overall health. We also acknowledge the important role that positive experiences of food and mealtimes play in developing lifelong healthy eating habits.

Our approach to food and nutrition is inclusive, child-centred and responsive to children's individual developmental, medical, cultural and dietary needs.

This policy reflects the following legislation and guidance:

- National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the Age of 12 Years in Wales (2026), particularly Standard 12: Food and Drink.
- Welsh Government Food and Nutrition Guidance for Childcare Settings.
- Food Safety Act 1990.
- Food Hygiene (Wales) Regulations 2006.
- Food Information Regulations 2014 and applicable allergen information requirements.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Food Standards Agency guidance on food hygiene, allergens and choking prevention.

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers and individuals involved in preparing, handling, serving or supervising food and drinks within Little Disciples Childcare.

2. Aims of the Policy

We aim to:

- Provide children with nutritious, varied and appropriately portioned food and drinks.
- Promote positive attitudes towards food and healthy eating.
- Ensure mealtimes are safe, relaxed, enjoyable and inclusive.
- Encourage children to develop independence, social skills and positive eating habits.
- Respect children's individual dietary requirements, allergies, intolerances and cultural or religious preferences.
- Minimise the risks associated with food preparation, allergies, choking and foodborne illness.
- Support children to recognise their own hunger and fullness cues.
- Work in partnership with parents, carers and relevant health professionals.
- Ensure all staff understand their responsibilities in relation to food safety and nutrition.

3. Food and Nutritional Standards

Little Disciples Childcare will follow the Welsh Government's Food and Nutrition Guidance for Childcare Settings when planning and providing food and drinks.

We will:

- Offer a balanced variety of foods from the main food groups, including fruit and vegetables, starchy carbohydrates, protein-rich foods and dairy foods or suitable alternatives.
- Provide fruit and/or vegetables regularly throughout the day, including as part of planned snacks and meals.

- Offer appropriate portion sizes according to children's ages, developmental stages and individual nutritional needs.
- Limit foods containing high levels of added sugar, salt and saturated fat.
- Encourage wholegrain and higher-fibre options where appropriate.
- Avoid routinely providing sugary snacks, sweets, confectionery and highly processed foods.
- Ensure children have access to sufficient food throughout their attendance.
- Make reasonable adjustments to accommodate individual dietary needs.
- Ensure the food provided is appropriate for the duration of each child's childcare session.

Children will never be forced to eat food or finish everything on their plate.

Additional portions may be offered where appropriate, taking account of the child's appetite and individual needs.

4. Drinks and Hydration

Fresh drinking water will be freely available and accessible to children throughout their time at Little Disciples Childcare.

Staff will:

- Regularly remind and encourage children to drink water, particularly during warm weather and physical activity.
- Ensure younger children and those requiring additional support are assisted with drinking.
- Offer plain milk or suitable unsweetened alternatives where appropriate.
- Avoid routinely providing sugary drinks, fizzy drinks and drinks containing caffeine.
- Ensure individual drinking cups or bottles are identifiable, clean and hygienically maintained.
- Monitor children who may require additional encouragement or assistance to remain hydrated.

Children will not be refused access to drinking water.

5. Meal and Snack Times

We recognise that mealtimes provide valuable opportunities for children's social, emotional and physical development.

Little Disciples Childcare will provide a welcoming, inclusive and relaxed environment where children can enjoy eating together.

Staff will:

- Establish consistent and appropriate meal and snack routines.
- Ensure children are seated safely at tables or in suitable designated eating areas.
- Provide appropriate crockery, cups and cutlery for children's ages and abilities.
- Encourage positive conversations and social interaction during mealtimes.
- Support children in developing independence, including serving themselves where appropriate and safe.
- Respect children's individual appetites and preferences.
- Encourage children to try unfamiliar foods without pressure or coercion.
- Avoid using food as a reward, punishment or behaviour management strategy.
- Ensure children have sufficient time to eat without being rushed.

Children who are reluctant to eat will be offered reassurance and encouragement. Persistent concerns about food intake will be discussed sensitively with parents or carers.

6. Choking Prevention and Safe Eating

Little Disciples Childcare recognises that choking presents a significant risk, particularly for younger children.

All staff have a responsibility to ensure food is prepared, served and eaten safely.

6.1 Safe Eating Arrangements

- Children must remain seated while eating.
- Eating while walking, running, playing or engaging in physical activities is not permitted.
- Children must be appropriately supervised throughout meals and snacks.
- Staff must remain attentive and ensure children are within sight and hearing.
- Younger children and children with identified additional needs will receive closer supervision where appropriate.
- Children will be encouraged to take manageable mouthfuls and chew food properly.
- Staff will intervene sensitively when a child is eating too quickly or placing excessive amounts of food in their mouth.
- Food will not be left accessible in areas where children may take it without appropriate supervision.
- Children will not be permitted to share food where this could present an allergy, dietary or choking risk.

6.2 Safe Food Preparation

Food will be prepared in a manner appropriate to each child's age, developmental stage and individual abilities.

In particular:

- Grapes, cherry tomatoes and similar small round foods will be cut lengthways into quarters or smaller pieces for younger children.
- Hard fruit and vegetables will be cut appropriately, grated, softened or cooked where necessary.
- Sausages and similar foods, where provided, will be cut into narrow strips rather than round slices.
- Bones, hard stones and pips will be removed.
- Cheese and other firm foods will be prepared in appropriately sized pieces.
- Whole nuts, popcorn, hard sweets and other high-risk choking foods will not be provided to children under five.
- Other foods presenting a choking hazard will be avoided or suitably adapted according to current guidance and individual risk assessments.

6.3 Individual Choking Risk Assessments

Where a child has an identified choking risk, swallowing difficulty or a history of choking incidents:

- An individual risk assessment will be completed.
- Parents or carers will be consulted.
- Advice from relevant health professionals will be incorporated where appropriate.
- Specific food preparation, supervision and support arrangements will be documented.
- Relevant staff will be informed of the measures required.
- Arrangements will be reviewed following incidents or changes in the child's needs.

6.4 Responding to Choking Incidents

Staff will respond immediately to any suspected choking incident in accordance with their paediatric first aid training and the setting's emergency procedures.

Emergency services will be contacted where required.

All incidents will be recorded and reported to parents or carers, and any required notifications will be made to relevant authorities.

The Manager will review incidents to identify any additional preventative measures.

7. Food Allergies and Special Dietary Requirements

Little Disciples Childcare is committed to ensuring children with allergies, intolerances or specific dietary requirements can participate safely and inclusively in food-related activities.

7.1 Information Gathering

Before a child begins attending, parents or carers will be asked to provide information about:

- Diagnosed food allergies.
- Food intolerances.
- Medical conditions affecting food intake.
- Religious or cultural dietary requirements.
- Vegetarian, vegan or other dietary preferences.
- Feeding, chewing or swallowing difficulties.
- Any necessary medication or emergency treatment arrangements.

Parents and carers are responsible for informing the setting of any changes.

7.2 Allergy Management

Where a child has a known food allergy:

- An individual allergy management plan and risk assessment will be completed where appropriate.
- Relevant medical information and emergency procedures will be recorded.
- Staff will be made aware of the child's allergy and required precautions.
- Ingredients and food labels will be checked before food is served.
- Suitable alternatives will be provided or agreed with parents.
- Food preparation arrangements will minimise the risk of allergen cross-contact.
- Emergency medication, where prescribed, will be accessible in accordance with the child's healthcare plan and the setting's medication procedures.
- Staff will receive appropriate information and training in recognising and responding to allergic reactions.

Staff must never assume that food is safe without checking the relevant ingredients and dietary information.

Where the safety of a food item cannot be confirmed, it must not be served to the child concerned.

7.3 Maintaining Dietary Records

A current record of children's dietary requirements will be maintained and made accessible to authorised staff who need the information to provide safe care.

Information will be handled confidentially and in accordance with the setting's data protection procedures.

8. Food Brought into the Setting

Where children bring packed lunches, snacks or other food from home, parents and carers will be encouraged to provide nutritious, balanced and age-appropriate options.

Parents will be informed of any relevant food safety arrangements, including safe storage and foods that present particular risks.

Staff will:

- Ensure food brought from home is stored appropriately.
- Follow agreed arrangements for refrigerated or temperature-sensitive food.
- Encourage healthy choices sensitively and without judgement.

- Check that food is suitable for children with known dietary requirements where necessary.
- Ensure potentially hazardous foods are prepared or managed safely before being served.

Where food presents an immediate choking, allergy or food safety risk, staff may withhold the item and offer a suitable alternative where available.

Any concerns will be discussed respectfully with parents or carers.

Food provided from home must not be shared between children unless this has been specifically authorised and assessed as safe.

9. Food Hygiene and Safety

Little Disciples Childcare will comply with applicable food safety legislation and guidance from the Food Standards Agency and relevant Environmental Health authorities.

9.1 Food Preparation and Handling

Staff involved in food handling will:

- Maintain high standards of personal hygiene.
- Wash hands thoroughly before preparing, handling or serving food.
- Ensure children wash their hands before eating.
- Use clean and suitable equipment and food preparation surfaces.
- Prevent cross-contamination and allergen cross-contact.
- Follow safe food storage, preparation and serving procedures.
- Check use-by dates and the condition of food before serving.
- Follow appropriate temperature controls for food requiring refrigeration, cooking, reheating or hot holding.
- Dispose of unsafe, contaminated or out-of-date food appropriately.

9.2 Staff Illness

Staff experiencing vomiting, diarrhoea or other symptoms that may present a food safety risk must inform the Manager or designated person.

Staff must not undertake food handling duties while affected by an illness that could contaminate food.

Relevant exclusion periods and return-to-work guidance will be followed.

9.3 Cleaning and Food Safety Checks

The setting will maintain appropriate cleaning and monitoring arrangements, including:

- Routine cleaning and disinfection of food preparation areas.
- Cleaning of tables and eating surfaces before and after use.
- Suitable cleaning and storage of utensils and equipment.
- Temperature monitoring where required.
- Appropriate food storage checks.
- Recording and addressing any identified food safety concerns.

Food hygiene monitoring and any corrective actions will be documented through the setting's established procedures.

10. Menu Planning

Menus and snacks will be planned to provide variety and nutritional balance.

When planning food provision, we will consider:

- The ages and developmental needs of children attending.
- The length and timing of childcare sessions.
- Children's dietary requirements and allergies.
- Cultural and religious food preferences.
- Seasonal availability and variety.
- Children's views and preferences.
- Recommendations within Welsh Government guidance.

Menus will be reviewed periodically to maintain variety and identify opportunities for improvement.

Parents and carers will be provided with appropriate information about food and drinks offered within the setting.

Any significant substitutions will take account of known allergies, dietary requirements and nutritional needs.

11. Promoting Positive Attitudes Towards Food

Staff will promote healthy eating in a positive, inclusive and developmentally appropriate way.

We will:

- Encourage children to explore a wide range of foods, flavours and textures.
- Talk positively about food without labelling children as good or bad eaters.
- Avoid creating anxiety or shame around food choices or portion sizes.
- Respect children's feelings and preferences.
- Encourage children to recognise when they are hungry or full.
- Provide opportunities for children to develop self-help and independence skills.
- Support children who experience sensory sensitivities or difficulties relating to food.

Children will not be pressured to taste or consume food they do not wish to eat.

Where concerns persist, staff will work with parents or carers to agree appropriate support.

12. Food Education and Learning Opportunities

We believe that children learn best through positive experiences and meaningful activities.

Healthy eating will be promoted through age-appropriate activities, including:

- Exploring different fruits, vegetables and foods.
- Food tasting and sensory activities.
- Growing fruit, vegetables and herbs where opportunities allow.
- Simple cooking and food preparation activities.
- Discussions about where food comes from.
- Learning about personal hygiene and handwashing.
- Understanding the importance of drinking water.
- Exploring foods from different cultures and traditions.
- Encouraging sustainable practices and reducing food waste.

All cooking and food-related activities will be appropriately risk assessed, with consideration given to food allergies, hygiene, equipment and supervision.

13. Supporting Children with Additional Learning Needs

Little Disciples Childcare recognises that some children may require additional support during mealtimes because of developmental, sensory, physical or medical needs.

We will:

- Work in partnership with parents, carers and relevant professionals.
- Make reasonable adjustments to mealtime arrangements.
- Provide appropriate support with eating and drinking.
- Respect sensory sensitivities and individual food preferences.
- Follow relevant individual healthcare or support plans.
- Provide additional supervision where identified as necessary.
- Review arrangements regularly to ensure children can participate safely and comfortably.

Children will not be excluded from shared mealtimes or food-related activities because of a disability or additional learning need.

14. Partnership with Parents and Carers

We recognise that parents and carers play a central role in shaping children's attitudes and experiences of food.

We will:

- Share information about our approach to healthy eating.
- Inform parents about food and drinks provided.
- Seek information about children's dietary requirements and preferences.
- Discuss significant changes in children's eating habits where appropriate.
- Encourage consistency between home and the setting.
- Provide opportunities for parents to share feedback.
- Address concerns about nutrition, food safety or dietary provision promptly and sensitively.

Where a child has persistent difficulties with eating, drinking or maintaining adequate nutrition, staff will discuss concerns with parents and encourage advice from an appropriate health professional where necessary.

15. Staff Responsibilities and Training

All staff have a responsibility to promote healthy eating and maintain safe food practices.

Childcare Manager / Responsible Individual

The Manager will:

- Ensure this policy is implemented and reviewed.
- Oversee food safety arrangements and compliance.
- Ensure appropriate staff training and supervision.
- Monitor the management of allergies and dietary requirements.
- Review food-related incidents and concerns.
- Ensure identified improvements are implemented.

Deputy Manager / Designated Person in Charge

The Deputy Manager or designated Person in Charge will:

- Support the day-to-day implementation of the policy.
- Ensure staff understand children's individual dietary requirements.

- Monitor safe food preparation and supervision.
- Address immediate food safety concerns.
- Report incidents or significant concerns to the Manager.

Childcare Practitioners and Other Staff

All relevant staff will:

- Follow the policy and associated procedures.
- Promote positive and inclusive mealtime experiences.
- Maintain appropriate supervision of children eating.
- Follow food hygiene and allergy management arrangements.
- Complete relevant food safety training appropriate to their duties.
- Report concerns, incidents or unsafe practices promptly.

Training requirements will be reviewed regularly, and records will be maintained within the staff training register.

16. Monitoring, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Little Disciples Childcare is committed to reviewing and improving the quality of food and nutrition provision.

This will include:

- Reviewing menus and snack provision.
- Monitoring compliance with food safety arrangements.
- Reviewing allergies and individual dietary plans.
- Considering feedback from children, parents and staff.
- Reviewing accidents, incidents and near misses involving food.
- Undertaking appropriate checks and audits.
- Identifying and addressing areas for improvement.

Where necessary, improvement actions will be recorded, assigned and monitored until completed.

17. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually, or sooner where:

- Legislation or national guidance changes.
- Food safety requirements are updated.
- A significant food-related accident or incident occurs.
- An allergy or choking incident identifies the need for additional safeguards.
- Feedback, monitoring or inspection findings indicate that improvements are required.

The Manager will be responsible for coordinating the review, with approval sought from the Management Committee in accordance with the setting's governance arrangements.

All staff will be informed of relevant changes and required to familiarise themselves with the updated policy.

18. Related Policies and Procedures

This policy should be read alongside the following Little Disciples Childcare documents, where applicable:

- Health and Safety Policy.
- Food Safety and Hygiene Procedures.
- Allergies and Special Dietary Requirements Policy.

- Medication Policy.
- Accident and Incident Reporting Policy.
- First Aid Policy.
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.
- Additional Learning Needs Policy.
- Infection Prevention and Control Policy.
- Risk Assessment Procedures.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

19. References and Further Guidance

- Welsh Government – National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children up to the Age of 12 Years (2026).
- Welsh Government – Food and Nutrition Guidance for Childcare Providers.
- Food Standards Agency – Food Hygiene and Allergen Guidance.
- NHS – Choking Prevention and Safe Food Preparation Guidance.
- Food Safety Act 1990.
- Food Hygiene (Wales) Regulations 2006.
- Equality Act 2010.