**The Willow Tree Children’s Centre**

**Healthy Eating Policy**

At The Willow Tree Children’s Centre, we ensure that all children are provided appropriately with suitable, sufficient, healthy, nutritious and safe food and drinks. We are committed to promoting children’s healthy lifestyles through the prevention of illness, encouragement, and establishment of healthy eating habits. Most of our Staff has trained as Healthy Ireland Smart Start Practitioners for our service. The Willow Tree has been awarded the Healthy Ireland Smart Start Award from birth to 6 years. We are committed to improving the health and well-being of the children and families attending our service by integrating and sustaining this programme as part of our curriculum.

We recognize that eating a balanced diet is vital for good health and wellbeing. Food provides the energy, protein, essential fats, vitamins and minerals to live, grow, and function properly. Children need a wide variety of different foods to provide the right amounts of nutrients for good health and development. The food a child eats in their early years influences their eating habits as they grow and develop. It is important to teach young children about healthy food choices and staying well hydrated, and to help them develop good habits and a healthy relationship with food from an early age.

Procedures & Practices

* We encourage positive socialization and calm interactions at snack and meal times. Family style dining and the use of real materials are considered a positive practice and encouraged. Staff sit with children during mealtimes to give example of positive social skills.
* Good eating habits should be encouraged such as mindful eating - developing a deeper connection with food and creating lifelong, healthy habits. This encourages children to focus on the present – noticing thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.
* Enough time is allowed for bottle-feeding and mealtimes. Each child is given enough time to eat and enjoy their bottle, snack or meal without being rushed.
* Children with allergies and special diets will be carefully supervised.
* Sweets, chocolate, crisps and fizzy drinks are not permitted. If your child is having a Birthday Party, we do not accept cakes or treats; instead we provide a wooden birthday cake to sing the “Happy Birthday” song with. Children will also be given a card made by their friends and a party/disco will be had to celebrate the special day. We provide fun activities and sometimes prizes on special occasions such as festivals e.g. Halloween and on the last day of each term.
* Children will be encouraged to feed themselves as appropriate for their age and development and will be assisted as required. Equipment provided are suitable for the

 children’s ages and stage of development eg. easy-grip forks and spoons, spill-proof cups.

* Bibs are available for babies and toddlers at meal times.
* Infants younger than 12 months are held while bottle-feeding.
* Children will never be forced to eat but will be gently encouraged to eat healthy. Children who have not eaten, or who are hungry are offered food at times outside routine meal and snack times and/or an alternative food option.
* Children sit at a comfortable height in relation to the table top. The table and chair are suitable to their age and stage of development.
* Children are encouraged to try different food tastes, textures, colours and so forth.
* Children will be encouraged to help tidy up after meals.
* Healthy eating is promoted through an arrangement of activities for the children including play, stories, music, outings, cookery, books, food guide pyramid for young children and

food tasting days representing a variety of cultures, cooking experiences.

* Activities are available for children who have finished their food before others.
* Fresh drinking water is always available.
* Children will always be supervised by a member of staff and will never be left unattended during snack and mealtimes.
* Children are encouraged to wash their hands before each meal and wet wipes are provided to clean their faces after each meal to encourage self-care skills. Please see our Illness prevention and infectious disease control policy for further information.
* Parents and guardians are informed if their child has not eaten well.
* Our staff are trained in Basic Food Safety and Hygiene (HACCP Level 1) and we adhere to safe catering and best practices laid down by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland to ensure food is safely stored, prepared and served.
* Parents/ guardians of children in the Catkins can send in healthy pre-cooked meals. On receipt of the food from the parent, we ensure compliance with the relevant food safety legislation. We understand it is our responsibility to ensure that the foods and drinks provided by parents/ guardians are: adequate, suitable, nutritious, varied and that they are stored and reheated safely.
* Current food safety guidance states that infant milks or infant foods should not be warmed in a microwave oven (Safefood & HSE). Microwaves heat unevenly and may cause “hot spots” that could scald the infant’s mouth. When using a microwave oven for reheating pre-cooked meals for children, other than infant foods inclusive of infant milks, we ensure we comply with the relevant food safety legislation. We document the delivery of food, the temperature of food when reheated in recording forms and checklists contained within our FSAI’s Safe Catering Pack, our food safety management system. Recording our checks, training and allergen management ensures that food is safely stored, prepared, reheated to the appropriate temperature and served to the children at a safe temperature.

Special Diets and Allergies

If a child needs a special diet, it is the responsibility of the parent or guardian(s) to inform the Preschool Manager of this, so that arrangements can be made to accommodate the child’s requirements. There is space for these details on the application form.

If the requirements are more complex, parents should provide a copy of the diet sheet prepared for the child by a Dietician. Parents or carers are requested to provide details of foods eaten (and not eaten) by the child. Religious and cultural requirements, where specified by parents or guardians, will be accommodated where possible. Parents’ and guardians’ choices will be supported where possible.

If a food allergy is suspected, the parents should be encouraged to discuss this with their doctor. It is unwise to restrict children’s food choices without professional assessment and individual information.

Evening Meal

Menus and lists of ingredients are on display in the lobby for the evening meal. These are sourced from Caraway Catering in Killarney. Any changes in the menu are noted, and any foods that are substituted are of equal nutrient value. The main meal must include appropriate servings of protein, starch, dairy, vegetables and iron.

We also provide an evening snack which typically includes fruit and granola bars/yoghurt bars/pancakes/oat cookies.

**Procedures regarding Infant Feeding**

We follow the Recommendations for the safe preparation and feeding of powdered infant formula in child day-care settings by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. We do not typically prepare powdered infant formula for children in our care unless agreed upon by management and parents in special circumstances.

Feeds should be prepared at home using the 70°C preparation method recommended for the safe feeding of PIF in domestic setting. Cooled feeds should be marked with the child’s name and stored in the body of a refrigerator below 5°C until they are completely cold prior to transportation but for no longer than 24 hours. Immediately prior to leaving for the child day-care facility, the correct number of feeds should be taken from the refrigerator and placed ideally in a clean cool-box or bag with a suitable number of ice-blocks, to maintain the feed at 5°C. On arrival at the child day-care facility, the feeds should be transferred from the cool-bag or cool-box to a dedicated refrigerator in the child-care facility maintained at 5°C or below. The fridge should be equipped with a fridge thermometer to enable the temperature to be checked and adjusted if necessary.

To feed, child-care workers should remove 1 bottle just before it is needed. The bottle should be checked to ensure the name on the bottle corresponds to the infant. If necessary, the feed should then be warmed to feeding temperature using a bottle warmer or by standing the feed in a container of warm water. Never leave a feed warming for more than 15 min. Ensure the feed is not too hot by shaking the bottle and placing a drop of liquid on the inside of the wrist – it should feel lukewarm (note: some children drink milk at refrigeration temperatures).

Discard any feed that has not been consumed within 2 hours of warming/first use. For slow feeding babies, use a fresh feed after 2 hours. Unused feed should be discarded and the used bottles rinsed in warm tap water. All feeding bottles should be returned at the end of the day when the infant is collected. Used feeding bottles should be cleaned thoroughly at home and sterilised as recommended in the section on cleaning and sterilising feeding equipment.

 (i) The safe preparation of infant feeding equipment

In special circumstances where formula is made up onsite, washing and sterilisation of bottles are done at the child day-care facility, regardless of whether the bottles have been sterilised at home.

• Wash hands thoroughly before cleaning feeding equipment.

• Wash feeding and preparation equipment in hot soapy water before sterilisation. Scrub the insides and outsides of teats and bottles with a bottle and teat brush to remove all remaining traces of feed.

• Dishwashers can be used to clean feeding and preparation equipment but only if the equipment is dishwasher proof and stacked correctly following machine instructions. The suitability of feeding and preparation equipment for dishwasher use should be checked prior to washing. **Dishwashers will not sterilise feeding and preparation equipment**.

• Clean feeding and preparation equipment should be sterilised prior to use:

– Steam is the best method of sterilising feeding equipment. Always follow manufacturer’s instructions

– Sterilisation is also possible by immersion in boiling water. Fill a large pan with tap water and completely submerge all feeding and preparation equipment ensuring there are no trapped air bubbles. Cover the pan, bring to the boil and boil for at least 3 minutes making sure the pan does not boil dry

– Sterilisation is also possible using chemical sterilant added to water. Make up a batch of sterilant following manufacturer’s instructions. Ensure all equipment is completely immersed in the liquid and that there are no trapped air bubbles. Leave the equipment submerged for the length of time specified by the manufacturer and follow all other manufacturer’s instructions

• Wash hands and surfaces before handling and assembling sterile feeding equipment.

• Bottles or other feeding equipment should be assembled immediately after sterilisation. Care should be taken to avoid touching the teats and the insides of the bottles, sealing discs, bottle caps and collars. Sterile tongs may be used to fix teats into collars. Once assembled correctly, bottles will remain sterile for 24 hours providing that they remain unopened.

(ii) Facilities and Procedures

There must be a clean dedicated suitable area for the preparation and handling of PIF. If the preparation is taking place in the main kitchen, the main kitchen facilities/ equipment can be dual use but the preparation of PIF should not take place at the same time as other food preparation.

• Staff with responsibility for the preparation and handling of PIF have received appropriate training based on the written procedures in place.

• The implementation of the written procedures is routinely monitored by the room leader.

• A system should be established to ensure full traceability of PIF from infant to the actual batch of PIF used to feed that infant. To facilitate this, there is a need to have documentation individual to each child setting out his/her requirements, the feed used and what they consumed. All bottles should be labelled with the child’s name and date of preparation.

• All feeding and preparation equipment should be clean and sterilised.

• Refrigerators used for the storage of PIF should be equipped with a fridge thermometer and subjected to regular checking and adjustment where necessary to ensure that they are operating at a temperature of 5°C or below.

• Each infant formula tin/container should be labelled to include the date of opening and name of child it belongs to. The PIF should be kept in its original container.

The following steps should be followed when using PIF:

**Step 1.** Boil fresh tap water in a kettle or other suitable covered vessel

**Step 2.** When boiled, leave the water to cool in the kettle (or other suitable covered vessel). Use a clean thermometer to ensure the water is between 70°C and 75°C before use

**Step 3.** Clean the feed preparation area thoroughly and wash hands with soap and hot water and dry

**Step 4.** To make up the feed:

Pour the amount of hot water required into a sterile bottle taking care to avoid scalding. **Water always first!** Make each feed up in a sterile bottle by adding the exact amount of PIF as instructed on the label using the clean scoop provided. Re-assemble the bottle tightly and carefully as instructed by the bottle manufacturer and shake well to mix the contents, taking care to avoid scalding (care should be taken that each scoop is stored with its original container)

**Step 5.** Cool feed quickly to feeding temperature by holding the bottle(s) under cold running tap water or immersing in a large volume of cold tap water. Ensure that the cold water does not reach above the neck of the bottle during cooling. Suitable refrigeration, ideally solely dedicated to the storage of infant formula must be provided for the prepared feed where it is made in advance

**Communication Plan [For staff & families]**

All parents/guardians are to be informed of the policy and procedures regarding Healthy Eating on enrolment. Staff members will check with parents/guardians that they have read and understood the policy and provide any assistance needed.

A summary of this policy will be included in the Parent/Guardian Handbook and the full policy is available on the website www.blennerville.playschool.com

This policy will also be reviewed with staff at induction and annual staff training. When a complaint is received, the person making the complaint will be given a copy of this Policy and Procedures.

A copy of all policies will be available during all hours of operation to staff members and parents/guardians upon request.

Parents/guardians may receive a copy of the policy at any time upon request.

Parents/guardians and the staff team will receive written notification of any updates.

This policy must be observed by management and all staff members.

This policy is underwritten by the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 and the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of Pre-school and school-age Services) Regulations 2018.

This policy was reviewed and adopted by The Willow Tree Children’s Centre on 1st January 2024.

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of Management

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