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17 Food in Family Day Care

Food is always important in Family Day Care

How do you meet children's nutritional needs while they are in your care in Family Day Care?

Are **you** one of those educators that provide all food, from breakfast to afternoon tea (or even dinner if required) who has gradually worked out the best and easiest meals to provide?

Or are **you** an educator that feeds your children from lunch boxes that parents provide, working with parents to ensure their lunch box contents are healthy?

Do **you** do cooking and food preparation with children as part of your educational program? Do you grow vegetables and fruit and then cook them?

Do **you** all share morning and afternoon tea, and then children have their main meal provided by parents?

There is no wrong or right way to do it – but those educators that do provide food or do cooking experiences with children seem very enthusiastic about what they do – saying it is a great way to teach children about food, nutrition and food safety.

Regardless of how we do it, all educators must make sure that when children are in your care their food is healthy and safe.

Whether we provide children with home cooked food or give them the food their families have prepared in their home, we have a responsibility to ensure the food they eat is nutritious and safe.





Food safety refers to handling, preparing and storing food in a way that reduces the risk of children becoming sick from the food they eat.

1. [Food poisoning](#), NSW Food Authority.

What are the key food issues in Family Day Care?

Children should eat nutritious food

Because a large proportion of their daily food consumption can happen in Family Day Care, we have to ensure that each child has enough food and that that food is nutritious, when they are with us. We have this obligation whether it is us providing food for them, or their families.

Children are more vulnerable to food borne illnesses

Some people are more at risk of getting food poisoning (food borne illness) than others. This includes children under 5 years old. Because of this we need to take special care when buying, storing and preparing food for children in our care. Food poisoning happens when we eat or drink contaminated food or drink. An estimated 4.1 million Australians are impacted by food poisoning each year according to the NSW Food Authority.¹

Food needs to be stored and prepared safely

Many education and care services that provide food as part of their service including Family Day Care need to meet requirements in the Food Standards Code and *Food Act 2003*. This may require registering with your local council.

Children may have allergies to or suffer from anaphylaxis from certain foods

As Family Day Care educators, we need to reduce the risk of children having an allergic reaction to food while they are in our care, including the more severe allergic reaction, anaphylaxis. We may do this by not having certain foods in our house, or by other risk reduction measures.

What would poor quality around food and food safety look like in Family Day Care?

The National Quality Framework requires that each child's health is supported and promoted, and that healthy eating is promoted and appropriate for each child. It also requires that the design of our facilities is appropriate for the operation of a service and that our premises and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.

In services that are not providing high quality around food and food safety we may see:

- ▶ lunchboxes not being refrigerated when brought from home
- ▶ children eating unhealthy food from lunchboxes
- ▶ mealtimes that are chaotic
- ▶ unclean kitchens
- ▶ few or no opportunities for children to engage in cooking activities
- ▶ children being cared for in garages or sheds with no cooking facilities or inadequate kitchenettes
- ▶ no policies about children bringing in high allergy risk food such as nuts, seafood, wheat, milk and eggs
- ▶ children and educators not washing hands before eating or preparing food
- ▶ food being prepared unhygienically
- ▶ unhealthy food being shared with children such as cakes, salty snacks, etc
- ▶ menus not being available/different food being shown than what is on the menu



Preparing and storing food safely, being aware of allergies and teaching children about nutrition are important in Family Day Care.



What would high quality food and food safety look like in Family Day Care?

High quality around food and food safety comes in many different forms. A Family Day Care educator may be providing high quality when all food comes in from families, or we may be high quality because we prepare all food that children eat during their day!

Generally, high quality Family Day Care services in this area would have many of the following features:

- ▶ inviting places to eat as a group
- ▶ high attention to and understanding of nutrition and of food safety procedures
- ▶ food being shared and prepared regularly (either daily or as part of the educational program)
- ▶ food being grown at the service then cooked and shared
- ▶ food being discussed with families, and resources being shared with families about food safety and nutrition
- ▶ the educator would have a good understanding of food allergies and anaphylaxis
- ▶ the educator would teach children about food safety
- ▶ clean kitchens and areas for children to prepare and cook food
- ▶ older aged children being given more responsibility in food preparation
- ▶ the educator would use many opportunities to teach children about nutrition
- ▶ the educator would have done food safety training and professional development courses such as *Munch and Move* and *Get up and Grow*
- ▶ the educator would have a lot of knowledge about each child's cultural background in relation to food choices and eating habits

- ▶ the educator would understand and manage each child's dietary requirements
- ▶ the educator would support and encourage breastfeeding in families
- ▶ educators who supply food would use a checklist or program to ensure it was in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines²
- ▶ where food was provided by the educator the menu would be diverse, healthy and interesting
- ▶ educators would understand food serving sizes
- ▶ educators would not serve unhealthy (discretionary food) and would serve healthier food for special occasions
- ▶ children would have access to a variety of fruit – at least 2–3 different types each day and at least five different types each week
- ▶ resources about healthy eating and food safety such as posters and leaflets for families would be available.

“Element 2.1.3 of the National Quality Standard requires that “healthy eating and physical activity are promoted and appropriate for each child.”

2. [Healthy Eating For Children: Teach your child healthy habits for a healthy life.](#)



Cooking for children

Promoting healthy food and drinks

Under the Regulations and the *National Quality Standard*, we are responsible for ensuring that all the children we care for get healthy (nutritious) meals, snacks and water throughout the day. It's also important that children enjoy positive mealtime experiences while in our care.

Regardless of whether we provide food for the children or families provide their own food, all educators need to promote good nutrition for children in their care and to start the process of teaching children about healthy food.

Meeting dietary requirements

The learning frameworks (*EYLF* and *MTOP*) both stress that good nutrition is essential to healthy living and enables children to be active participants in play. Healthy eating is an important part of a child's growth and development.



It is important in Family Day Care that we don't:

- ✗ use food as a reward or comfort
- ✗ introduce solid food or a new food to an infant without the parents' permission.
- ✗ allow children to eat without active supervision
- ✗ ignore children's food preferences (although we still need to ensure they are getting the nutrition they need)
- ✗ ignore cultural considerations in eating such as not eating certain foods on certain days, eating particular foods, or use of particular utensils or hands for eating
- ✗ discourage breastfeeding
- ✗ provide discretionary food (foods that are not essential for our health – food that is high in saturated fat, added sugars, and salt).

It is important in Family Day Care that we do:

- ✓ support children to make healthy food choices
- ✓ always have fresh water for children to drink at all times
- ✓ ensure children receive enough nutrition while they are in our care
- ✓ have food and drinks available to children at frequent and regular intervals throughout the day
- ✓ plan food and beverages to meet the preferences of each child as well as their dietary and nutrition requirements
- ✓ plan food and drinks for special occasions and excursions adequately
- ✓ role model healthy food choices (no serving children healthy food and snacking on chips yourself!)
- ✓ assist parents in meeting their children's nutritional needs by providing advice about food and or lunchbox choices
- ✓ discuss the introduction of solids to infants with their families
- ✓ have menus on display if we are providing the food.

Preparing food safely

As a Family Day Care educator we must always implement adequate health and hygiene procedures, and safe practices for handling, preparing and storing food, to minimise the risk of children we are caring for being sick.

If we are preparing food for children daily, or only on some occasions, we need to be aware of how to prepare food safely.

Do you have the skills and knowledge to prepare food safely?

- ▶ **How do you update your food safety skills and knowledge?** You should do safe food handling courses on a regular basis.
- ▶ **Are you aware of the need for different safety levels for different age groups?** Children under five are more vulnerable than older children.
- ▶ **Do you know what foods are most likely to cause food poisoning?**³ (Raw and undercooked poultry, raw or lightly cooked eggs, leafy greens and vegetables, raw milk, cheese, sprouts, seafood, rice, deli meats and fruit)

- ▶ **Do you know the difference between cleaning and sanitising?** Cleaning requires the use of warm to hot water, detergent and physical action to remove food debris and dissolve grease and dirt to ensure the surfaces are clean to touch and free of visible matter and odours.) Sanitising is the process of applying heat (usually very hot water) or chemicals or a combination of both heat and chemicals, to an already clean surface to reduce the number of bacteria and other organisms to a safe level.

Do you know about cooking and reheating food to safe temperatures?

- ▶ **Do you know about temperature danger zones?** The 'temperature danger zone' for food safety is between 5°C and 60°C. Bacteria can't grow easily at temperatures outside of this zone.
- ▶ **How long do you have before food is safe?** Food doesn't immediately become unsafe when it's in the temperature danger zone. It should be okay for up to two hours.

3. [10 High Risk Foods More Likely to Cause Food Poisoning](#), Australian Institute of Food Safety.



Did you know that children under the age of five years are vulnerable to food poisoning and at a greater risk of developing serious health complications from food borne illnesses?



Making sure that the areas where we prepare and/or serve food from are adequate is as important as making sure our play areas are safe in Family Day Care.

- ▶ **How long should you cook foods?** Cooking food properly and to the right temperature reduces the risk of food poisoning.
- ▶ **Do you know how to reheat foods?** When you reheat leftover foods, make sure all parts are steaming hot. Don't reheat food more than once.
- ▶ **Do you know to cool leftovers quickly?** Cover them and put them in the fridge or freezer. Eat refrigerated leftovers in one to two days.

Do you wash and dry your hands as frequently as you should?

You should wash and dry your hands:⁴

- ▶ before starting to prepare food
- ▶ after touching raw meat, fish, eggs, or vegetables with soil on them
- ▶ after using the toilet
- ▶ after blowing your nose
- ▶ after touching an animal
- ▶ after touching any sores or cuts

4. [Food safety](#), Health Direct.

Drying your hands is very important. Bacteria can be transferred in the moisture of damp hands.

Is your food preparation area adequate?

When Family Day Care first started in Australia, children were generally cared for within the main part of an educator's home. It was unusual for educators have specific sections of their houses only devoted to Family Day Care. As it becomes more common for educators to operate out of dedicated sections of their houses, we need to make sure that the food preparation areas or kitchenettes we have access to are suitable for the purpose and are safe, clean and well maintained.

If we use our household kitchen, we need to maintain it to a higher standard than what we might if we were not providing Family Day Care (and make sure that our family members follow this too!)

In the *National Quality Standard*:

- ▶ Element 3.1.1 demands that your physical environment be **Fit for purpose** Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, fixtures and fittings are suitable for their purpose, including supporting the access of every child.

- ▶ Element 3.1.2 demands that you physical **Upkeep** your physical environment Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.

Consider things such as:

- ▶ Do I have easy access to water to wash hands, fruits, and vegetables?
- ▶ Do I have easy access to refrigerators and stoves or microwaves so I can keep food in the best temperature range?
- ▶ Is my kitchen area clean and pest free?
- ▶ Can I clean all cooking equipment, benches and utensils with warm water and detergent after use and allow to dry properly before putting away regardless of if I am using a kitchenette or kitchen?
- ▶ Can I dispose of rubbish easily and safely?

Keeping food safe when it is brought from home

If families pack lunchboxes for children at our Family Day Care we need to work with them to ensure it is safe for children to eat at your Family Day Care.

The Food Authority of NSW⁵ says that we need to think about food handling activities such as preparing, storing and transporting food for children.

Preparing [families]

- ▶ Wash and dry your hands properly before preparing food
- ▶ Encourage everyone at home to always wash and dry their hands before eating or cooking, after using the toilet, after touching animals, after sneezing and coughing, and after handling rubbish
- ▶ Don't prepare food if you have an infectious illness
- ▶ Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly in clean, drinking-quality water just before preparing
- ▶ Use a clean chopping board and knife each time, or

thoroughly clean them between different food types (eg between raw and ready-to-eat food).

- ▶ Keep raw foods (e.g., raw meat, chicken, eggs) separate from cooked foods (e.g., frittata, cooked chicken) or ready-to-eat foods (e.g., sandwiches, cut fruit) to avoid spreading harmful bacteria through cross contamination
- ▶ Check 'use-by' dates so you don't use food that is out of date.

Storing [families and educators]

- ▶ Make sure your fridge is set at 5°C or lower and that your freezer is working properly
- ▶ If the lunch is made the night before, store it in the fridge overnight.

Transporting [families]

- ▶ Pack food in an insulated lunch box or a cooler bag
- ▶ Place a frozen drink bottle or ice block inside to help food stay cool or pack food that doesn't need to be kept cold, eg

5. [Food brought from home](#), NSW Health Authority.

sandwiches with shelf stable sandwich spreads (e.g., 100% fruit spread or Vegemite™), UHT dairy products and whole fruits (not cut up).

Supplying breastmilk or infant formula safely

- ▶ Breastmilk or infant formula should be supplied in clean and sterilised bottles that are clearly labelled with the child's name and date of preparation.
- ▶ Formula bottles that will be made up by the educator should have the correct amount of boiled water or formula powder measured out (follow manufacturer's instructions carefully).
- ▶ Breastmilk bottles or prepared formula bottles should be stored in the main part of the fridge (not in the door) until ready to be transported. They should be transported in a cooler bag or esky with an ice brick and then stored in the educator's fridge."



Educating families about food safety

One of the things we have to do as a Family Day Care educator is help families understand food safety.

The Food Safety Information Council provide these 5 tips for parents preparing lunchboxes:

- ▶ “When buying lunchboxes choose ones that have room for a frozen drink or freezer block and are easy to clean and dry.
- ▶ Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly before preparing food.
- ▶ Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly.
- ▶ Make sure lunchbox foods are always well separated from other foods in the refrigerator, particularly raw meats, chicken and fish.
- ▶ Keep the lunch cool in the fridge until you are about to leave home.”

Do you have information you can share with families about food safety?



Taking food on excursions

The NSW Food Authority⁶ advises that:

“If you take food for children to eat on an excursion, it is important that the food is transported correctly so that it remains safe to eat before serving.

Choosing foods

- ▶ Avoid taking perishable foods if they are not to be eaten within four hours. Choose safe alternatives if possible, eg food that doesn't need to be kept cold, such as sandwiches with jam or Vegemite™, crackers, muffins, UHT dairy products, whole fruits (not cut up)

Packing

- ▶ Chill any perishable foods thoroughly in the fridge before the excursion
- ▶ Pack chilled foods in an esky or cooler bag with ice bricks or frozen drinks to keep them cool
- ▶ Pack hot foods in an insulated container (eg foam box, thermos) to keep them hot

- ▶ Cover or wrap foods, or seal in a clean container
- ▶ Keep raw foods separate from cooked or ready-to-eat foods
- ▶ Pack hand wipes or sanitiser gel if there won't be any water to wash hands before preparing or eating food

Transporting

- ▶ Minimise transport time (in between packing and serving)
- ▶ Be aware of time spent in the temperature danger zone, since you can't place food back in the fridge after two hours
- ▶ Avoid opening insulated bags and containers until you are ready to serve the food

Serving

- ▶ Wash and dry hands properly before touching food
- ▶ Try to serve and eat foods within two hours of it being prepared

6. [Taking food on excursions](#), NSW Food Authority.

Examples of higher risk foods for transport

- ▶ Sandwiches containing meat or cheese, eg ham, devon, chicken loaf
- ▶ Hot food that has to be served hot, eg soups, casseroles
- ▶ Pre-prepared salads
- ▶ Pre-made fruit salad or cut fruit
- ▶ Desserts with cream or eggs in them
- ▶ Milk, cream, soft cheeses, eg ricotta

Examples of safer alternatives for transport

- ▶ Sandwiches containing spreads, e.g., jam, Vegemite™
- ▶ Bread, wraps
- ▶ Crackers, crispbread
- ▶ Cooked vegetables

- ▶ Whole fruit (can be cut up just before serving)
- ▶ Muffins, biscuits, scones, muesli bars, slices
- ▶ Hard cheese, eg cheddar
- ▶ UHT milk
- ▶ Dried fruit”



Cooking with children

Do you cook with children?

Do you do it to prepare food for special occasions such as birthdays? Or do you do it as part of your curriculum, so that children learn how to help with food preparation?

Do you always prepare shared fruit plates for children, or do you get them to help with cutting up and presenting food?

Including cooking in your curriculum is a great way to teach maths and STEM skills. And anyone who has done cooking with children knows their excitement at seeing raw ingredients transform like magic into food!

- ▶ Cooking with children can encourage an interest in food, healthy eating habits and skills for life.
- ▶ For very young children short and simple cooking activities are best.
- ▶ For older children, you can introduce more complex recipes.

Educating children about food safety

Do you use the time you cook with children to educate them about food safety? Start by teaching the children why food safety is so important. Let them know about the risks of food poisoning and explain to them that nasty things like bacteria grow on food and these can make us sick.

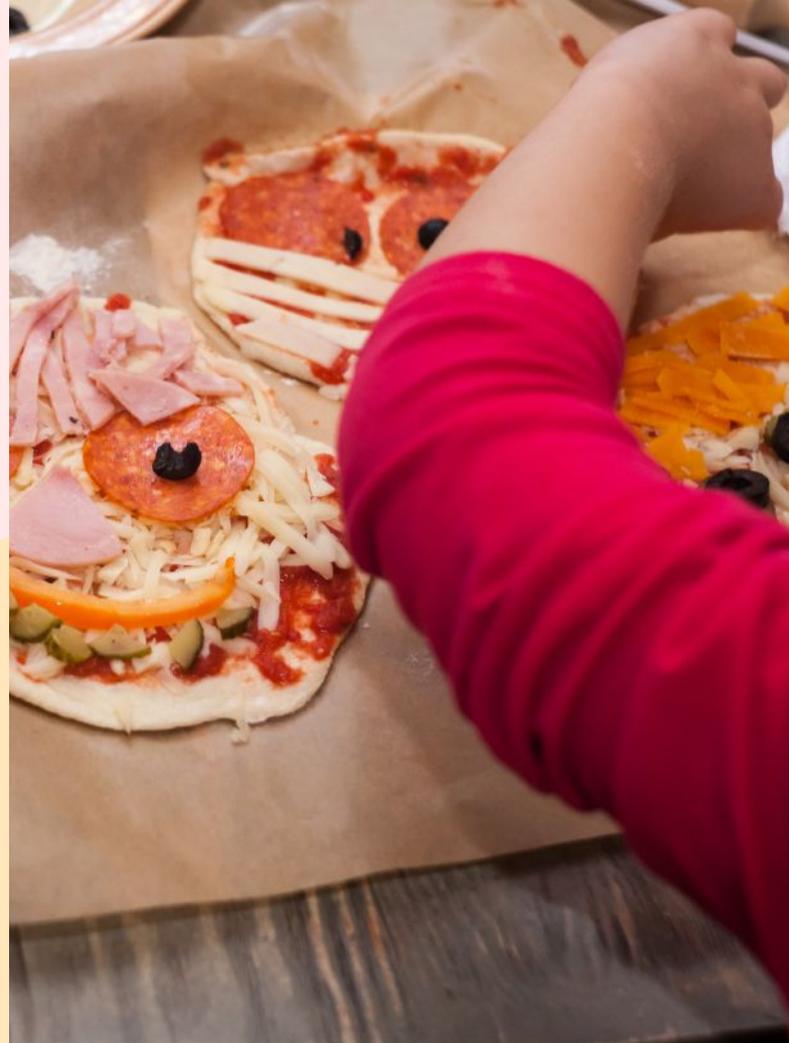
Cooking with kids is not just about ingredients, recipes, and cooking. It's about harnessing imagination, empowerment, and creativity.

Guy Fieri

Also, explain that we can avoid food poisoning with some easy steps. Role model food safety to them and help them do things like washing chopping boards and putting food away into the fridge.

Educating children about nutrition

When you are cooking with children it is a good time to teach them about good nutrition. Remember all the messages from the Munch and Move program – you can download the resources from this program from <https://healthykids.nsw.gov.au/munch-move-resources>.



Mealtimes

How do you make mealtimes positive? Do you:

- ▶ encourage children to participate in and enjoy, snack and mealtimes without feeling rushed?
- ▶ spend time discussing healthy food choices with children?

ACECQA⁷ says that the key questions we should consider are:

- ▶ Does our physical environment promote positive mealtimes? (Tables where we sit with the children or alternate spaces inside and outside can encourage great mealtimes to happen.)
- ▶ Do our mealtimes nurture relationships? (Our relationships with the children, and the children's relationships with each other?)
- ▶ Do our mealtimes promote holistic health? (Physical, social and emotional health can all be nurtured by positive meal times.)
- ▶ Are mealtimes a part of the educational program? (Mealtimes allow children to learn about their identity, relationships, their community and their world.)

7. [We hear you: Creating positive mealtimes](#), ACECQA.



Food allergies and anaphylaxis

As educators we have to always keep informed of and implement, current practices and guidelines from recognised authorities in relation to allergies and anaphylaxis. All educators must have their anaphylaxis management training current.

- ▶ Food allergy is becoming more common and as a Family Day Care educator we are all likely to have children with food allergies in your care at some stage.
- ▶ Children are dependent on us to provide a safe environment, including the provision of safe food.
- ▶ The foods that are most likely to cause allergies in children are peanuts, other tree nuts (Brazil, cashew, hazelnuts, and almonds), fish, shellfish, eggs, wheat, milk, milk products, soy, seed and some fruits.
- ▶ Food allergies are more common in children under 5 years of age than in older children as young children may grow out of food allergies. The most common food allergies are due to milk, eggs and peanuts.

- ▶ Peanut allergy is the most likely allergy to cause anaphylaxis. The most severe form of allergic reaction to any substance is anaphylaxis. This is life threatening and effective immediate management requires adrenaline from an auto adrenaline injector device (Epipen or Anapen).
- ▶ Sometimes a food intolerance can be confused with a food allergy because many of the symptoms are similar. However, intolerance and allergy are not the same thing – allergy involves the immune system but intolerance does not. Food intolerance will not lead to anaphylaxis.



- ▶ An allergic reaction to food can be triggered by even very small amounts. Intolerance is when a person can tolerate a certain amount of the food trigger, but when they have had too much, they become unwell (e.g., diarrhoea, bloating, headaches, rash and mouth ulcers). One example of an intolerance is lactose intolerance.
- ▶ Some Family Day Care educators will decide to declare their service peanut free or will not serve specific foods if a child with a known food allergy is enrolled.
- ▶ Have you seen the [Allergy Aware website](#)? There are some great best practice resources for managing food allergy in education and care services.
- ▶ When you enrol a child with a diagnosed food allergy, you must develop a risk-minimisation plan in consultation with the child's family.



Educators need to consider how they will deal with a child having an allergic reaction to food, before it happens. Children can have their first allergic reaction to a food while in our care. Always follow our first aid and anaphylaxis training.

What do the Learning Frameworks and the National Quality Standard and the Regulations say?

The *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* and *My Time, Our Place (MTOF)*, the Regulations and the *National Quality Standard* lay the foundations and expectations for us about food and food safety in Family Day Care.

The Early Years Learning Framework

The *EYLF* says that:

“Good nutrition is essential to healthy living and enables children to be active participants in play. Early childhood settings provide many opportunities for children to experience a range of healthy foods and to learn about food choices from educators and other children.”

My Time Our Place

MTOF says that:

“Good nutrition is essential to healthy living and enables children to be active participants in play and leisure.”

School age care settings may provide opportunities for children to experience a range of healthy foods and to learn about food choices from educators and other children.”

What does this actually mean?

1. Children need to be fed well to have the energy to play

2. We need to teach children about healthy food in our Family Day Care service

Quality Areas 2 and 3 of the National Quality Standard

Parts of Quality Area 2 (Standard 2.1 Health) and Quality Area 3 require us to provide children with healthy food and prepare it / store it / serve it in environments that are safe for food preparation and storage.

Elements 2.1.3 of the National Quality Standard

Element 2.1.3 requires that “healthy eating and physical activity are promoted and appropriate for each child.”

Elements 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 of the National Quality Standard

Element 3.1.1 demands that our environments are fit for purpose and Element 3.1.2 demands that be well upkept.

What does this actually mean?

1. Family Day Care educators must promote healthy eating

2. Our settings must enable us to prepare and store food safely

Education and Care Regulations

The most important parts of the law and regulations in regards to food require both the **Family Day Care service** we are registered with **and** us as **educators** to:

- ▶ implement:
 - (a) adequate health and hygiene practices; and
 - (b) safe practices for handling, preparing and storing food to minimise risks to children being educated and cared for. (Regulation 77)
- ▶ ensure that children being educated and cared for:
 - (a) have access to safe drinking water at all times; and
 - (b) are offered food and beverages on a regular basis throughout the day. (Regulation 78)
- ▶ ensure that where you provide food for the children it must be:
 - (a) nutritious and adequate in quantity; and
 - (b) chosen having regard to the dietary requirements of individual children taking into account—

- (i) each child's growth and development needs; and
- (ii) any specific cultural, religious or health requirements. (Regulation 79)

- ▶ ensure that where you provide food for the children you must ensure that a weekly menu:
 - (a) is displayed where families can see it; and
 - (b) accurately describes the food and drinks that you will provide each day (Regulation 80).

The **Family Day Care service** that you are registered with:

- ▶ must ensure that practices and procedures in relation to the safe handling, preparation, consumption and service of food are developed and implemented as part of risk minimisation plans for children with medical conditions (where relevant to that condition) (Regulation 90)
- ▶ must have a policy around nutrition, food and beverages, dietary requirements (Regulation 168).



Did you know that as a Family Day Care educator, you can receive an infringement notice and a fine of up to \$2,000 for breaching regulation 77,78,79 or 80?)

This booklet is part of the PD In Your Pocket professional development program.



This topic – **Food in Family Day Care** – has an accompanying webinar and video, both of which can be viewed as videos or listened to as podcasts.

There is also a Facebook Group where you can discuss the topic with other Family Day Care educators in NSW.

For more information about PD In Your Pocket, go to:

www.nswfdc.org.au/pdinyourpocket



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“Laughter is
brightest where
food is best.”

Irish proverb

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