

This resource is part of the Mini Professional Development package on the topic of Nutrition in early childhood. These have been developed by the Healthy Eating Advisory Service to support health promotion professionals in delivering engaging and practical sessions for Cooks Network meetings

Designed to use in meetings, it includes a range of optional discussion prompts to guide conversations and encourage interaction. You can choose which prompts to use or adapt the session using your own ideas that suit the needs and interests of the audience.

Activity 1 – Discussion at the START of the session

In small groups or as a whole group, take turns answering the following questions.

Remind cooks that there are no right or wrong answers. We are providing an opportunity to share what they know and believe about nutrition in early childhood.

1. Why do you think offering nutritious food is important for children's health?
 - Prompts/ideas: growth, development, energy levels, classroom behaviour, emotional regulation
2. What makes it easier, or harder, to provide nutritious food in your centre?
 - Prompts/ideas: time for preparation, costs, preferences, recipe ideas
3. When preparing meals in your long day care centre, what are your goals or priorities?
 - Prompts/ideas: preparing fun meals, preparing meals that all children in the centre will eat, creating meals from different cuisines, National Quality Standard – wanting to achieve high rating for their centre

Activity 2 – Discussion at the END of the session

In small groups or as a whole group, take turns answering the following questions.

Remind cooks that there are no right or wrong answers. We are providing an opportunity to share what they have learned from the session.

1. Why do you think offering nutritious food is important for children's health?
 - Prompts/ideas: growth, development, energy levels, classroom behaviour, emotional regulation
2. What makes it easier, or harder, to provide nutritious food in your centre?
 - Have cooks consider what they can do to manage some of the challenges they face with providing nutritious meal options.
 - Prompts/Ideas
 - For limited preparation time: bulk cook and freeze certain ingredients.
 - If concerns are raised regarding food safety, you can refer to local council for food safety guidelines.
 - For costs: re-use leftovers in other meals or recipes, purchase 'odd shaped' produce which is often sold at a cheaper price, bulk buy dry goods like wholegrain pastas, rice.
 - For challenges with children having food preferences: Increase exposure to different meals/ingredients to increase acceptance, offer variety so that you know that children will eat some meals and snacks even if they don't eat the meal that isn't their preferred.
 - For more information, refer to our resources [Introducing new foods to children](#) or [How to introduce new foods to children – video series](#)
 - You can run another PD session on ['managing fussy eating'](#)
3. When preparing meals in your long day care, what are your goals or things you keep in mind?
 - Hopefully after the session, cooks will consider offering a wider variety of nutritious food options when meal planning. Again, there are no correct answers, and some other considerations could include: preparing fun meals, preparing meals that all children in the centre will eat, creating meals from different cuisines, National Quality Standards – wanting to achieve high rating for their centre

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Discussions about nutrition and its role in supporting healthy eating in children can sometimes lead to differing opinions. During these sessions, you may have cooks ask you some additional follow up questions to the information discussed. To help you feel confident and prepared, we've covered a few of these below. Remember, it is also okay to acknowledge when further information or support is needed. You can refer cooks to the HEAS team or an appropriate health professional for additional support as needed

Why are certain foods (discretionary items) not allowed in childcare when they can be included in an overall healthy diet?

These foods may be enjoyed occasionally at home, but in long day care, services have a duty of care to provide the most nutritious meals possible to children. The goal is to always offer foods that will support growth, development and learning. By following the Menu planning guidelines, you can be ensured that your menu will reflect the best practice which will help children meet their nutritional requirements.

Shouldn't children be expected to finish all the food on their plate?

The [Division of Responsibility](#), helps children build long-term healthy habits and relationship with food by learning to trust their own hunger and fullness cues. We want to reduce pressure and food battles so that they can learn these cues over time.

Note: If you are not comfortable having these discussions, please refer families to an appropriate health professional.

You can also run another of HEAS' mini-PD sessions on '[Managing fussy eating](#)'.

I am worried that I will prepare different meal choices, and the children won't eat it and there will be a lot of food waste. How do I avoid that happening and what should I do if this happens?

There are several strategies that you can do to minimise food waste in your long day care centre. Sometimes there will be ingredients that you can repurpose and use at another meal of the day or use to prepare another recipe. For example:

- Leftover milk or yoghurt are great to use in preparing smoothies
- leftover fruit and vegetables can also be used for smoothies.
- extra vegetables can be grated up and used in savoury muffins, soups or casseroles.

'Family style serving' (placing food in the middle of the table for older children to serve themselves) is a great way to encourage independence and minimise food waste. This allows children to choose how much of the different foods at the mealtime they want to eat and avoids over serving food to children who are not as hungry.

If concerns are raised regarding food safety, you can refer to local council for food safety guidelines. You can read more information on food safety [here](#).

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