Food Play Policy

Grass Roots Nursery Group - Food Play Policy

1. Purpose

This policy outlines how Grass Roots Nursery Group uses food-based sensory and learning activities safely, respectfully, and inclusively. It ensures that food play is intentionally planned, rigorously risk-assessed, and fully aligned with statutory **Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)** requirements, **Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)**, and our setting's allergy and safer eating protocols.

2. Principles of Food Play

- **Purposeful & Developmentally Appropriate**: Food play is used intentionally to support fine motor skills, sensory exploration, language acquisition (**WellComm** targets), early mathematics, and cultural understanding.
- **Safe, Inclusive & Equitable**: Activities are planned around individual children's dietary, medical, and religious needs. No child is excluded from a sensory activity due to an allergy or medical condition.
- **Safer Eating & Choking Prevention**: All food used in play strictly complies with Early Years choking prevention standards and safer eating guidelines.
- **Respect for Food & Economic Sensitivity**: We maintain a mindful approach to food. In light of cost-of-living pressures and sustainability, staple foods are used sparingly and never in a way that encourages wastefulness or undermines healthy eating habits.
- **Hygiene & Infection Control**: High standards of hygiene are enforced before, during, and after activities.

3. Scope of Food Play

Food-based play may be incorporated to support:

- **Sensory Exploration**: Texture, temperature, and scent exploration (e.g., citrus water, cold cooked pasta, textured fruit rinds).
- **Fine Motor & Early Mark-Making**: Squeezing, pouring, mashing, and tracing in edible purees or cornflour gloop.
- **Early Maths & Science**: Measuring, state changes (dissolving, melting), and weight comparisons.
- **Cultural & Community Celebrations**: Exploring traditional ingredients, baking, and tasting sessions linked to the **Think Equal** curriculum and home learning.

Note: Food used for sensory play is strictly distinct from mealtime food and will never be served as a substitute for structured snack or meal times.

4. Choking Prevention & High-Risk Food Restrictions

To prevent choking or internal blockages, the following rules apply to all food play across all room age groups:

Prohibited / High-Risk Food Items

- **Raw Jelly Cubes**: Strictly prohibited due to high choking and airway obstruction risks.
- **Whole Grapes, Cherry Tomatoes, & Soft Soft-Stone Fruits**: Must be quartered lengthways if used in any activity.
- **Whole Nuts or Seeds**: Strictly prohibited across all settings (Grass Roots is a nut-free nursery).
- **Uncooked Dry Rice / Hard Dry Pasta in Under-3 Rooms**: Strictly prohibited unless fully contained inside sealed sensory bottles or sealed bags to eliminate swallowing/aspiration risks.
- **Raw Eggs, Unpasteurised Dairy, or Raw Flour**: Prohibited due to *Salmonella* and *E. coli* risks. (Any flour used in playdough/gloop must be heat-treated prior to use).

5. Allergy Management & Anaphylaxis Control

Before any food play activity is planned or executed, staff must adhere to the following statutory checklist:

1. **Famly System Verification**: Practitioners must check the live **Famly** register and individual Care Plans to verify all recorded allergies, intolerances, and dietary preferences for attending children.
2. **Zero-Cross Contamination**: Utensils, bowls, and tuff trays used for food play must be thoroughly sanitised. Dedicated allergy-safe equipment must be used for children with identified medical conditions.
3. **Severe Allergy / Anaphylaxis Protocol**: If a child in the room has an active Auto-Injectable Epinephrine (AAI) plan or severe contact allergy, the allergen must be completely excluded from the entire room setting.
4. **Handwashing**: Children and staff must wash hands with warm water and soap **before** and **immediately after** engaging in food play.

6. Planning, Supervision & Risk Assessment

- **Risk Assessment**: High-risk sensory food activities must have a completed **BrightSafe Risk Assessment** logged prior to the session.
- **Active Supervision**: Food play must be supervised at **100% active line-of-sight visual supervision** at all times. Staff must remain within arm's reach of children to monitor for mouthing or distress.
- **Substitutions & Inclusivity**: If a child cannot interact with a specific food item due to medical, cultural, or religious reasons, an equivalent, safe alternative must be provided to ensure equal participation.

7. Hygiene, Disposal & Environmental Standards

- **Surface Sanitation**: All tuff trays, tables, and equipment must be cleaned with food-safe antibacterial sanitiser before and after use.
- **Single-Session Disposal**: Any food handled by children during sensory play must be disposed of immediately following the activity and never stored for future sessions or served as food.

- **Sustainable Sourcing**: Where appropriate, settings are encouraged to use low-cost, surplus, or bruised fruit/vegetables donated by local suppliers that are unfit for retail but safe for tactile play.

8. Parental Communication & Partnership

- We inform parents via **Famly** about planned food-based sensory or baking activities.
- Parents are encouraged to update the setting immediately regarding any new dietary requirements, allergies, or cultural preferences.
- We respect parental requests to opt a child out of specific food play activities and will provide non-food sensory alternatives.

9. Staff Responsibilities & Safeguarding Links

- **Practitioners**: Responsible for checking **Famly** dietary records, maintaining visual supervision, modeling safe handling, and executing correct disposal.
- **Room Leaders & Leadership Team**: Responsible for monitoring room practice, approving **BrightSafe** activity risk assessments, and ensuring full compliance.
- **Safeguarding Escalation**: Any safety breach, severe allergic reaction, or near-miss incident during food play must be recorded on **CPOMS** and reported to the Nursery Manager/DSL immediately.