

Food Policy

ISP supports foster families to live healthy and safe lives and aims to provide positive and nurturing experiences. Food is an essential part of life but is also a powerful symbol of care and a foundation of human attachment.

This policy explains the necessary food health and safety principles for foster homes and agency events and the importance of understanding and responding appropriately to individual needs.

This policy is compliant with the [Fostering Services National Minimum Standards](#) and the [Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#).

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Associated Policy and Supporting documents	Health and Wellbeing Policy Health and Safety in the Foster Home Policy

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Food Safety and Hygiene

Principles of food safety and hygiene must always be followed when preparing and storing food for children, colleagues or visitors. Staff members/foster parents who prepare food for events at their local centre must complete the online Food Safety and Hygiene training course. We encourage all foster parents to undertake this training to promote safe food preparation in foster homes.

Care must also be taken in relation to food allergies and intolerances. When arranging food for events, staff should encourage attendees to share any dietary requirements they have in advance and safeguard against exposure or cross-contamination. This may necessitate a ban on ingredients for serious allergies.

Wherever possible, to avoid accidental exposure where allergies are not reported in advance, food should be clearly labelled if it contains a common allergen (e.g. milk, eggs, nuts, wheat, soy) and if it was home-made, letting people know who made it will allow people with allergies to check ingredients with the cook.

Guidance on good food hygiene can be found in the Health & Safety Chapter of the Foster Parent Handbook [Home Hygiene & Infection Control - i-space](#)

Food and Health

In the interests of good physical health, we ask our foster parents to provide children with food that is nutritious and contributes to a balanced diet. Where children have specific dietary needs because of health conditions, foster parents will be guided by the child's Health Plan. Food provided for children at ISP events will be varied, include healthy and nutritious options and will also include special occasion treats.

As a therapeutic fostering provider, we understand the emotional significance of food for children and young people and particularly those who have had adverse food experiences. We also understand that emotional distress can lead to the development of food aversions and eating disorders, and that some children with developmental disabilities have strong sensory reactions to certain foods that impact their choices. These difficulties create a particular challenge for foster parents and can be a source of anxiety and distress for all parties. We encourage our foster parents to engage with our training programme and seek advice and assistance from staff and therapists. We will seek the support of external service providers as needed to help children and young people maintain a healthy weight and manage any physical and mental health problems.

Inclusion

Food choices and restrictions are varied, personal and can be influenced by food insecurity, trauma, health needs or disability, and cultural/religious belief. Food is typically associated with care, comfort, social engagement and enjoyment, and food is always provided at ISP events. We understand, however, that for some people food can be a source of stress, anxiety or indifference. We promote a non-judgemental response to people's needs and preferences, and a flexible approach to mealtimes to encourage inclusion and reduce tension.

In the foster home, food must always be available to children and mealtime routines are very important to reassure children who have experienced food insecurity. Where children have specific dietary needs, these must be accommodated, and their wishes and feelings around food options reasonably considered. Foster parents must not impose their own dietary choices on children and food must never be withdrawn as a punishment. We encourage foster families to include children in food preparation, and eat together wherever possible, whilst recognising that for some children this may involve a lengthy 'working towards' process.

When arranging food for events, staff should encourage attendees to share any dietary requirements they have in advance and ensure that food provided is varied and inclusive. If attendees are more comfortable bringing their own food, this should always be accommodated but should not be an expectation or the suggested solution to a catering challenge.

Sustainability and Waste Reduction

Whilst we will always plan events to cater appropriately to the number of attendees, there will be times when there is leftover food. For food hygiene reasons, food must not be left out of the fridge for more than four hours, at which point it must be refrigerated or thrown away. We recommend aiming to return leftovers to the refrigerator after two hours to reduce the risks of spoilage and invite attendees to take leftovers home with them to avoid wastage.

Any food that needs to be thrown away should be done so via regional food recycling services or composting.

We encourage the use of local independent businesses and seasonal produce.

Managing Concerns

There may be times when foster parents are concerned about a child's relationship with food or finding that mealtimes are challenging. Examples of concerns include:

- A noticeable change in the child's weight
- The child will only eat a very restricted range of foods
- The child is eating less than usual, or binge eating
- The child appears to be hiding food, or taking it without asking
- The child is throwing food away
- The child is refusing to eat, or showing distress at eating

Foster parents should report any concerns to their supervising social worker for discussion and intervention.

There may also be times when foster parents or staff have a concern about a colleague. Due to the sensitivity and secrecy of these conditions, eating disorders can develop unchecked if concerns are not raised. Concerns about a foster parent's welfare should be raised to their Registered Manager, and concerns about staff welfare should be raised to their line manager or an alternative member of the management team. Sensitivity and confidentiality are important, and concerns must not be discussed with other colleagues.