Early Years Guide to Healthy Eating: Information and resources for healthcare and early year’s professionals working with young children and their families helping them eat better to keep well.
Why is healthy eating important during Early Years?

Good nutrition within the first 1,000 days of life sets the foundation for all days that follow. By providing role models to promote healthy food choices and establish environments to support healthy eating habits, children can learn about good self-care within families to help reduce the risk of poorer health in childhood and achieve their potential to enjoy a good quality of life.

Despite this, many families are not eating an adequate diet which is shown by the significant number of primary school children entering and leaving primary school with excess weight each year. The level of unhealthy weight children in Buckinghamshire indicates how many may be at greater risk of diet-related illness because excess weight rises incrementally every school year. If left unaddressed children live in poorer health for longer storing up problems for adulthood.

In Buckinghamshire children with excess weight starting school in 2015-16, 18.8% of 4 and 5 year olds were an unhealthy weight this increases to 28.5% for 10-11 year olds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working together to support healthy eating for children under 5yrs</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Child and family:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Start 4 Life- Encourage mothers and babies to eat healthily and take required vitamin supplements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite community nursery nurses and health visitors to give a talk to raise awareness of Healthy Start</td>
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<td>Provide a designated area for breastfeeding mums to follow UNICEF Baby Friendly Code of Practice</td>
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<td>At 6 months encourage infants to try a variety of foods from the Eatwell Guide</td>
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<td>Avoid unsuitable food and drinks in early years such as foods high in salt and sugar (see BHT Trust Weaning Guidelines for further information.) Offer opportunities for children to explore food tastes, textures, colours, smells and sounds</td>
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<td>Provide age appropriate portion sizes</td>
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<td><strong>Early Years Providers:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adopt the Children’s Food Trust Eat Better Start Better Guidance</td>
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<td>Ensure all staff are aware of all standards for food and drink provision to competently prepare nutritious meals, snacks and drinks and examples of foods to include in packed lunches, snacks or as drinks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use a range of communication methods with parents/carers esp. English as an Additional Language (EAL)</td>
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<td>Common feeding issues and top tips</td>
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How to support children to make healthier food and drink choices

Adults are responsible for what food and drinks are given to children and how much is given. Food based activities in early years can help to build the skills and knowledge to recognize food and understand the connection with self-care. Through role play, outdoor play and exploratory activities children learn to express themselves. These opportunities outside mealtimes offer a way to express preferences on a variety of foods and familiarize with those needed to grow and keep well. Understanding the need to eat a balance of food sources to stay well interconnects wellbeing with learning about health; physical, emotional health. Learning and practicing decision making skills to make food choices can be supported in settings by:

- Adults act as role models to champion healthy eating environments and habits; attitudes to healthy food, feeding skills, social interaction in the dining room, providing enough time to eat, communicate a consistent healthy eating message, refer to service.
- Food challenges for the whole settings: grow and eat recipes, fundraising events, taste-test, try, buy and cook at home
- Menus have tooth friendly nutritious food apportioned as 3 meals, 2 snacks and drinks
- ‘Eat a Rainbow’, games and songs to name and remember fruit and vegetables, food groups
- Visit markets, farms and shops to observe where food is from and how it is made
- Share food policy and menus with families, offer opportunities to trial/taste meals.

‘Eat Better, Start Better’ training.

This 3 hour workshop is designed to help educate and advise on establishing a whole setting approach to develop the good eating habits necessary to help children maintain a healthy weight and thrive. The focus is to highlight the importance of the first 1000 days in ensuring healthy child development by improving the diets of children in early years which is commonly linked to the over consumption of foods and drinks high in salt, fat and sugar. The role of staff, parents, children and health partners supporting the setting in both facilitating and encouraging good eating habits is a key element within the training.
Survey results of past course participants

Have you used the information learnt in the training course in your own setting?

Answered: 5  Skipped: 0

Course transference into practice

Although feedback numbers are small this is a positive outcome and suggests that the workshop is providing information that is useful to the participants. The one highlighted no response is linked to an individual who suggests they already have good subject knowledge matter before attendance.

Top areas of practice influenced were highlighted as *communication with parents* and *awareness of appropriate food options*. This suggests that the course is increasing participant’s confidence to address issues around food and drink.

Specific use of course information by participants

- Suggested menus for lunch boxes to parents. Looked at snack time and made a couple of changes
- Lunchbox ideas and snack foods
- Being mindful of sugar content when deciding healthy meals

The feedback comments suggest the inclusion of age specific nutritional recommendations, and examples of appropriate snacks and menu inclusions appear to be providing the tools needed to make proactive changes in settings.

Further information can be found at ADD the EYS team weblink.

https://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/kb5/buckinghamshire/fsd/service.page?id=AODWvgwcZyU

This resource was produced by BHT Community Nutrition & Dietetics team [December 2017]
Case study 1 - Childminder

One past attendee (SM, 2016) stated the importance of access to training around healthy eating working in a solo role. Her job involves working alone to provide care and supervision to young children within a home setting. She is given full responsibility for welfare by parents and is expected to be aware of a lot of issues around health and education, as well as implementing them. The benefits of attending the training and the message she took home with her centre around improving both confidence and awareness. In a role where you have a lot of expectation placed on you it is important to have access to a resource that keeps you up-to-date and provides opportunity to ask questions.

This example shows how a group training environment provides opportunities for individuals working in less structured environments to get peer support. Providing evidence-based consistent messages around healthy eating ensures children received a standard level of care in all environments.

Case study 2 – Supervisor

Past attendee (KF, 2016) stated the importance of the training in highlighting the role of food for children. Her role has some organisational and managerial responsibilities with a setting which involves planning food and drink availability. She has the opportunity to influence the food provided and ensure that the staff utilise it in the right way for the children.

This example shows how the training was able to convey the ‘whole-setting- approach to food; linking the need to include preparation in the food choices so that the setting and the staff saw their role in providing a rounded nutritional intake. This change in practice will make sure that the setting is aware of the importance of meal planning and the staff can be seen to be providing a better quality of care.

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Case Study 3 - The Healthy Living Centre

The Healthy Living Centre based in the Southcourt area of Aylesbury is located in an area with high levels of deprivation. This is a social enterprise that receives funding and support from Aylesbury Vale District Council, Bucks County Council and Aylesbury Town Council amongst other charity funds. Its aim is noted as ‘…improve the health and wellbeing of people living and working in Buckinghamshire’ (Healthy Living Centre, 2017). It is a facility that provides a Nursery, Café and community activities such as exercise and healthy lifestyle services e.g. stop smoking.

The café is currently run by the previous Nursery Manager who has taken on the role as Commercial Manager. As Nursery Manager, ‘Eat Better, Start Better’ training was delivered to the newly appointed nursery staff team. As Commercial Manager 1:1 support was provided around menu development and healthy eating promotion for the café as it supplies the nursery meals.

Following the Eat Better Start Better training the nursery highlighted an increased involvement of the children in food based activities; designing activities including food items and food knowledge, involvement in basic food prep and handling, and wider promotion of healthy issues linked to food such as ‘oral health’. There is also increased communication with regular workshops and meetings provided for parents around healthy eating topics, and a recipe book provided to encourage family engagement in the healthy eating ethos. It would appear a whole-setting approach has been adopted to good effect.

Following the 1:1 support of the community café it highlighted an increased awareness of using methods to both encourage and promote healthier options. The menu shows a use of symbols to attract the attention to ‘healthy options’ and a move to ensure a lot of these are the more financially accessible options also.

‘Week 2 - Cutting vegetables with children, talking about whether they grow underground or in trees, vegetable stamping in paint. Reading a food related story’

Overall feedback with the Commercial Manager has shown that the impact of our training and support has been a more whole-setting approach to healthy eating; involving parents and children within early years, and improving communication links by increased knowledge and awareness acquired from our intervention. By updating knowledge and confidence to apply this in individual settings there is vast potential to influence health outcomes of those individuals utilising this community setting.

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References

The Healthy Living Centre (2017) ‘HOME’ Available at: http://healthylivingcentre.com/
(Accessed 21 September 2017)

The Healthy Living Centre (2017) ‘September–menu-café’. Available at:
(Accessed 21 September 2017)
Appendix: Signposts through local services to information and advice on early years nutrition

**Bucks County Council Public Health**

Health and Wellbeing Bucks webpage [www.healthandwellbeingbucks.org](http://www.healthandwellbeingbucks.org)

**Bucks Family Information Service Directory** [www.bucksfamilyinfo.org](http://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org)

- Children’s Centres and childcare provision
- Healthy Start Scheme- eligibility, application form and how to redeem vouchers
- Free School Meals- eligibility for Free School Meals
- School Food Plan
- SEND (special educational needs and disabilities)
- HENRY courses to support parents with feeding children aged 1-4yrs

**Bucks Early Years team - Early Years web** [https://extranet.buckscc.gov.uk/early-years](https://extranet.buckscc.gov.uk/early-years)

- Early Help links to BHT health visiting, school nursing and community nutrition team

**Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust**

BHT community nutrition and dietetic team for information on weight management services

[http://www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/Our%20clinical%20services/A%20to%20Z%20of%20clinical%20services/Dietetics/weight-management.htm](http://www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/Our%20clinical%20services/A%20to%20Z%20of%20clinical%20services/Dietetics/weight-management.htm)

Community nutrition team-nutrition training for early years

[https://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/kb5/buckinghamshire/fsd/service.page?id=AODWygwCZyU](https://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/kb5/buckinghamshire/fsd/service.page?id=AODWygwCZyU)

- link to the BHT community nutrition and dietetic team
- First Steps Nutrition resources to support nutrition in first year of life, complementary feeding, infant milks, vegan diets, preschool and visual guide to portion sizes
  [www.firststepsnutrition.org](http://www.firststepsnutrition.org)

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- Child Feeding Guide: healthy eating habits and tips to manage fussy eating, food refusal and weight
  www.childfeedingguide.co.uk
- Caroline Walker Trust: supporting looked after children, learning disabilities
  www.cwt.org.uk
- Eat Better Start Better training presentation slides
- Action for Children guidance available online as free downloadable resources
  https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/resources-and-publications/information-guides/eat-better-start-better/
- Food For Life Partnership www.foodforlife.org.uk
- EcoSchools www.eco-schools.org.uk
- School Food Plan: guidance for headteachers, governors and parents on whole school food policy
  www.schoolfoodplan.com
- British Nutrition Foundation primary and secondary curriculum resources and food competencies
  www.foodafactoflife.org.uk

Health Visiting www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/Health-visiting
- BHT guidelines on complementary feeding
- breastfeeding support services and infant feeding clinics
- Healthy Start- eligibility for scheme
- Universal infant free school meals

School Nurses- www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/School-nursing
- NCMP follow- up resource pack: Our Healthy Year Reception and Year 6
- Free School Meals
- link to BEAT eating disorder service provided by CAMHS

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