



Harvard Park Policies and Procedures:
Food for play and cooking activities

54. Food for play and cooking activities

Some parents/carers and staff may have strong views about food being used for play. It is important to be sensitive to these issues. For example, children who are Muslim, Jewish, Rastafarian, or vegetarian, should not be given food to play with which contains animal products (gelatine). Parents/Carers' views should be sought on this upon registration to the setting. In some cases, it is not appropriate to use food for play, particularly in times of austerity.

- Food for play may include dough, corn flour, pasta, rice, food colouring/flavouring.
- Food for play is risk assessed against the 14 allergens and is included in the written risk assessment undertaken for children with specific allergies.
- Staff are constantly alert to the potential hazards of food play, in particular choking hazards and signs of previously undetected allergies.
- Pulses are not recommended as they can be poisonous when raw or may choke.
- The use of raw vegetables for printing is discouraged.
- Dried food that is used for play is kept away from food used for cooking.
- Foods that are cooked and used for playing such as dough, have a limited shelf life.
- Cornflour is always mixed with water before given for play.
- Cornflower and cooked pasta are discarded after an activity as there is a high risk of bacteria forming.
- Utensils used for play food are washed thoroughly after use.

All products containing gelatine are not used in our settings. Products containing gelatine such as jelly are sourced from suppliers who supply vegetarian or vegan options.

Children's cooking activities

- Before undertaking any cooking activity with children, members of staff should check for allergies and intolerances by checking children's records.
- Children are taught basic hygiene skills such as the need to wash hands thoroughly before handling food, and again after going to the toilet, blowing their nose or coughing.
- The area to be used for cooking is cleaned. A plastic tablecloth is advised.
- Children should wear aprons that are used just for cooking.
- Utensils provided for children to use only when cooking, including chopping/rolling boards, bowls, wooden spoons, jugs and are stored in the cooking box.
- Members of staff encourage children to handle food in a hygienic manner.
- Food ready for cooking or cooling is not left uncovered.
- Cooked food to go home is put in a paper food bag and refrigerated until home time.
- Food play activities are suspended during outbreaks of illness.

Playdough and raw (uncooked) flour

All flour including cornflour is raw until the point it is heated or cooked. Raw flour poses a risk of E.coli to young children and current advice is that risk assessments and control measures should be in place to protect those with lowered immune systems and to protect children from harm .

- Only playdough that has been cooked or made with pre-cooked flour should be used.
- Only cornflour that has been cooked or made with pre-cooked cornflour should be used.
- If a child or member of staff is allergic to any of the ingredients they must be replaced, and a safe alternative used.
- Staff have up to date information about children's allergies or concerns about a potential high allergy and these are clearly displayed.
- If a younger child is likely to put the playdough/cornflour in their mouth, a safe alternative is provided.
- If a child is likely to eat the playdough due to persistent sensory seeking behaviours, the activity will be replaced with a safe alternative.
- Children are always supervised when playing with playdough or cornflour.
- Children and staff wash their hands before and after the activity.

Other activities with flour: Uncooked flour should not be used for activities where children are exploring through touch or taste, of there is a likelihood that they will put their fingers in their mouth.

Baking: Baking activities are accepted where flour is used and then the food is cooked. It must be ensured that the activity is risk assessed, and the children do not eat the uncooked flour or the mixture.

This Policies and Procedures pack was adjusted by Harvard Park.

Date meeting was held on 30/04/2026

Signed on behalf of the Directors and Proprietors

Nicki Saunders and Tracey Milstead