

# Diverse tastes



Welcoming children from diverse cultural backgrounds provides opportunities for introducing all the children to different foods and ways of eating, says Sarah West

**M**any early years settings across England have diverse populations, representing the multicultural, multi-ethnic society we live in. Children from minority communities may follow specific dietary habits and customs, and their families may exclude or prepare food in a particular way according to their religious or cultural beliefs.

As such, it is hugely important to reflect cultural diversity and variation in the food supplied within the nursery setting, and to value the contributions which different cultures and nationalities make to the variety of foods eaten in the UK today.

## Embracing differences

By creating a learning environment which provides children with day-to-day experiences of positive diversity and allows them to explore or question individual differences, practitioners can help children to oppose discrimination and prejudice from a young age.

Children should be encouraged to acquire positive attitudes and behaviours towards those with different identities from their own and learn to embrace differences rather than fear them - thus growing up with understanding and respect.

By embracing the different cultural beliefs, practices and individual needs of all families, you are able to create a sense of belonging for everyone who attends the setting. This will help children to celebrate

their own uniqueness and help instil the importance of being treated fairly in relation to their creed. Young children of every cultural or ethnic background need to develop a secure and positive sense of their own identity, and it's vital that nursery life helps reinforce this.

## Getting practical

The UK has such a diverse population that it wouldn't be feasible to cover all religious festivals in one setting. Instead, settings could demonstrate to staff members and families that they are inclusive and non-discriminatory by inviting them to share information about their own faiths and beliefs so that knowledge can be gained and shared.

## Celebrating diversity

Food is a wonderful way to introduce children to different cultures and develop positive perspectives. Try holding tasting days, where children bring in dishes from their country of origin - thus exploring and embracing the real lives of local families and their communities.

For fussy eaters who aren't keen to try new foods, cookery demonstrations are a great way of getting all children involved. Parents and members of staff can be encouraged to share their knowledge and experience by bringing in recipes or ingredients for display tables. Even picky eaters will enjoy being involved in investigating new ingredients and unusual cooking equipment such as woks and chopsticks, and helping to create food they can later eat.

## Festivals and celebrations

In settings with less cultural and ethnic diversity, you might include

festivals and celebrations in your planning as a way of celebrating diversity - as many festivals and celebrations have traditional food associated with them.

Events such as Diwali, Ramadan, Chinese New Year and Eid provide a valuable opportunity for children to learn about the specific foods associated with these events (as well as an opportunity for drawing related pictures, reading books, singing songs, learning dances and trying on traditional clothing).

You may wish to place the emphasis on the cultural aspect of the celebration rather than the religious element in order to avoid imposing any religious beliefs onto children.

Be mindful of the fact that food connected with special occasions is often high in fat, sugar and / or salt, so this needs to be kept in mind when planning (especially if there are several celebrations in a row). Try to find a balance of food to explore.

## Catering for diversity

It is required that nursery settings record and act on information from parents regarding each child's dietary needs, including cultural and religious considerations. It's, therefore, important to make sure that all staff are made aware of individual dietary requirements so that children's choices, beliefs and safety are respected and protected on a daily basis.

Delivering a menu that supports cultural and ethnic diversity can sometimes feel a daunting task for settings that care for children from many ethnic groups. The table below summarises some of the dietary practices that people of



Nutritious, visually appealing goulash

*'Try holding tasting days, where children bring in dishes from their country of origin - thus exploring and embracing the real lives of local families and their communities'*

different religions may follow. Use this information to help you plan appropriate menus, but be sure to talk to families to make sure your menu is specifically appropriate for their child.

Alternatively, outsourcing to a dedicated nursery caterer can help you to cater for the many differing requirements you may encounter and assist you in providing a wider variety of ingredients and dishes.

- Sarah West is the in-house nutritionist for nursery catering provider Zebedees, who provide nutritionally balanced meals to nurseries across the South of England  
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**Zebedees**  
LUNCH AROUND THE WORLD  
Standard Menu Autumn/Winter 2017

Date	Country	Main Course & Side Dish	Contents	Dessert
Friday 10 <sup>th</sup> November 2017	Scotland	Cock-a-leekie Stew New Potatoes	Diced chicken, swede, leeks, onion, carrot, celery, chopped tomato, garlic, provencal herbs, prunes, pearl barley, dried thyme, tomato & potato	Butterscotch Mousse
Friday 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2017	Hungary	Pork Goulash Fluffy Rice	Diced pork, onion, carrots, peppers, paprika, tomato, yoghurt, peas & rice	Natural Yoghurt with a Cocoa Swirl
Friday 22 <sup>nd</sup> December 2017	France	Coq au Vin Fluffy Rice	Diced chicken, carrot, onion, celery, garlic, thyme, mushroom, béchamel sauce, diced bacon & rice	Mint Choc Chip Ice Cream
Friday 12 <sup>th</sup> January 2018	Wales	Vegetable Broth & Dumplings Mixed Vegetables	Onion, garlic, carrots, turnip, swede, parsnip, pearl barley, wholegrain mustard, peas, green cabbage, tomato, carrots, peas, sweetcorn & dumplings	Banana Mousse
Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2018	Africa	West African Chicken, Lentil & Potato Mafé Fluffy Rice	Diced chicken, lentils, potato, kidney beans, sweet potato, butternut squash, tomato, carrots, onion, yoghurt, broad beans & rice	Pineapple, Mango & Peaches
Friday 23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2018	Poland	Bigos Hunters Stew Whotemeal Bread & Spread	Diced ham, sauerkraut, diced chicken sausage, mushroom, bacon, tomato, cabbage, potato, carrots, onion, peas, wholemeal bread & spread	Peach Yoghurt
Friday 16 <sup>th</sup> March 2018	Bahamas	Caribbean Chicken with Pineapple and Black Bean Sauce Fluffy Rice	Diced chicken, ground cinnamon, lemongrass, ginger, onion, pineapple, black eye beans, tomato, beans, garlic, green pepper, peas & rice	Pineapple & Mandarin Pieces
Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> April 2018	England	Bangers & Mash Vegetable Gravy	Speldhurst pork sausage, sweet potato, potato, carrot, swede & gravy	Stewed Apple

ALL MENU ITEMS ARE SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY

## Cultural Food Restrictions

Food	Jewish	Hindu*	Sikh*	Muslim	Buddhist
Eggs	No blood spots	It varies	It varies	Yes	It varies
Milk/yoghurt	Not with meat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cheese	Not with meat	It varies	It varies	It varies	Yes
Chicken	Kosher only	It varies	It varies	Halal only	No
Mutton/lamb	Kosher only	It varies	It varies	Halal only	No
Beef/beef products	Kosher only	No	No	Halal only	No
Pork/pork products	No	No	Rarely	No	No
Fish	Fish with fins & scales only	Fish with fins & scales only	It varies	It varies	It varies
Shellfish	No	It varies	It varies	It varies	No
Butter/ghee	Kosher only	It varies	It varies	It varies	No
Lard	No	No	No	No	No
Cereal foods	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Nuts/pulses	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fruit and vegetables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes