



# Building healthy foundations in the early years

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# What are we covering today?

- Building healthy food foundations during the early years
- Encouraging positive attitudes towards food
- Practical strategies to support food acceptance at mealtimes
- Embedding nutrition messages from an education perspective
- Links to *Food – a fact of life* resources and support
- Suggestions for further reading and sources of information.





# The Role of the Early Years Educator at Mealtimes

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# Setting the foundations

Consider how the environment supports eating...

- Remove distractions, loud noises
- Setting the table, getting children involved, presentation
- Prepare the sensory system for the mealtime/food activity – get their wriggle out!
- Appropriate seating position (foot support and 90-degree angle at hips, knees and ankles)
- Consider child skills to use cutlery or utensils to eat
- Consider length of time for meals/food activities

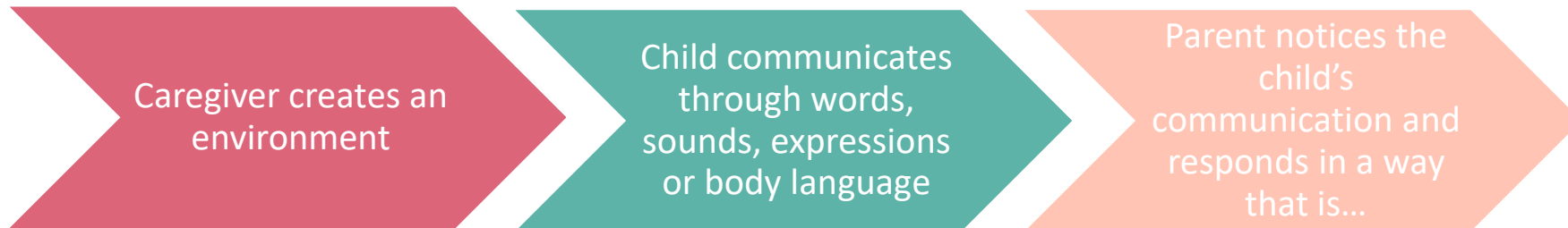


Image Source:

<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/fa/09/aa/fa09aac232282h1144405ebea3455b68--preschool-cl-kids.jpg> and <https://www.foundationg/product/cache/1/image/9df78e7136e95/p/r/productimage-simpl>

# A responsive feeding approach

- Responsive feeding is an approach to feeding that facilitates the (re)discovery of internal cues, curiosity and motivation whilst building skills and confidence. It is flexible and prioritises the feeding relationship and respects and develops autonomy.



- Timely
- Emotionally supportive
- Related to the child's communication
- Appropriate to the child's developmental stage
- Child experiences the response they were anticipating

# Autonomy

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- The responsibility of the caregiver is to decide:
  - What food is offered
  - When the food is offered
  - Where the food is offered

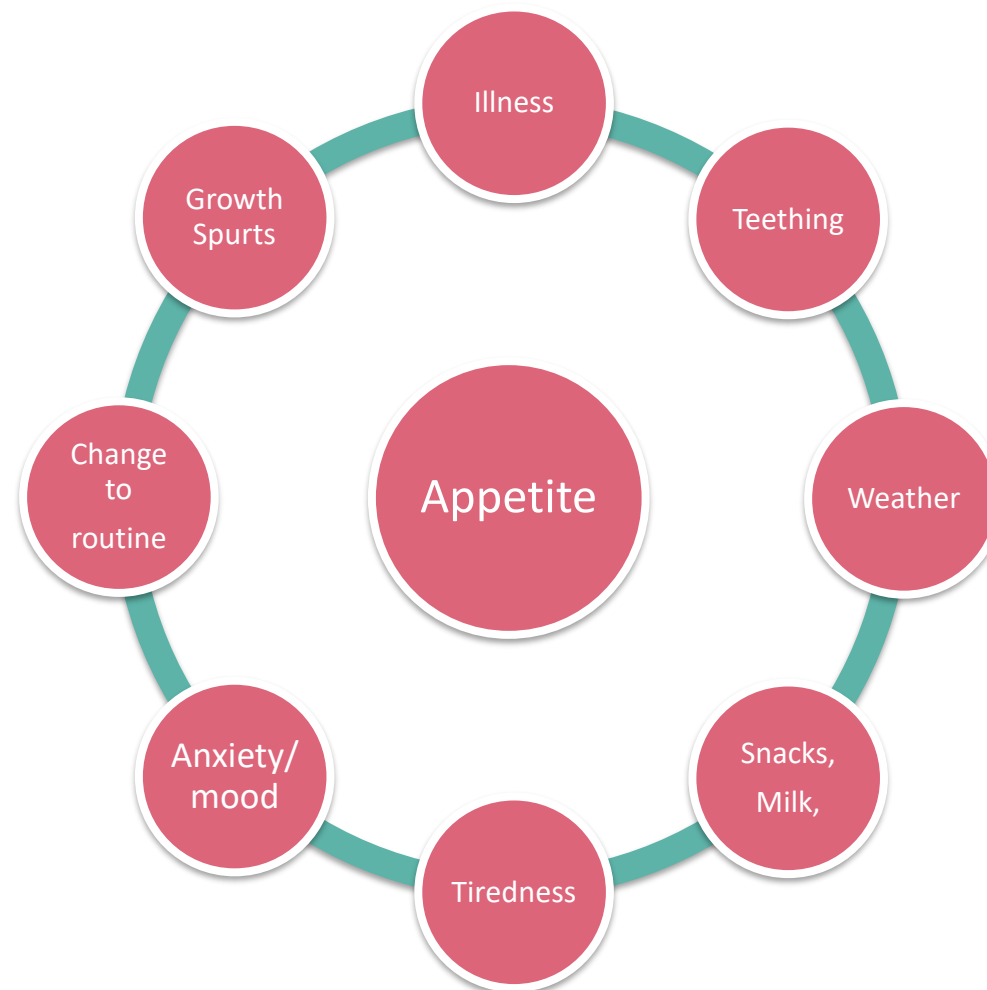
The responsibility of the child is to decide:

- How much, if any, they want to eat.



**You provide, they decide!**

# Understanding appetite





# Signs of fullness

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- Verbal communication – telling you they don't want to eat
- Turning head away from the spoon
- Clenching mouth shut
- Spitting food out
- Holding food in the mouth – food pocketing
- Look of disgust
- Blocking mouth with hand
- Crying
- Throwing food
- Signal or say 'no' in response to unwanted food
- Distract their parents/carers
- Become distracted
- Move away from the meal table



# Competence

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- Does the child feel like a competent eater?
- Is there a lot of criticism, correction, labelling adjustment, judgment?
- The types of foods offered and methods of feeding should align with the children's developmental stage
- If the foods and feeding methods are beyond a child's capabilities the child may feel incompetent and frustrated.



# Family-style serving

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- Avoid pre-plating food.
- Start with an empty plate
- Place foods in central serving bowls and allow children to self-serve
- Be aware of each child's dietary requirements – supervision is required
- Include accepted foods on the table where possible and allow the child to have their fill of the accepted foods
- At least one other eater present



# Role Modelling

- Children learn from watching others
- Forget your own dislikes and preconceptions. Avoid making negative comments about the food, consider your body language too
- Mealtime chat doesn't have to be focused on food. Non-food talk can be helpful at mealtimes and for very anxious children will help to take the focus off the food
- Focus on connection



# Mind Your Language

Instead of...	Try.....
Do you like it?	The pasta is warm and smells like tomatoes
Why don't you try the cucumber?	You can leave the cucumber on the plate if you don't want to try it today.
There's no pudding/second course until you've tried the broccoli.	This piece of broccoli looks like a tree!
You can't leave the table unless you eat 3 blueberries.	Are we all done here?
I thought you liked pasta...	If you aren't ready to try the pasta that's ok.
Well done! You've eaten so well.	I heard some loud crunching there
Yum, I really like the carrot. I think you'll like it too.	The carrot is cool and crunchy. Listen to it when I crunch.



# What is *Food – a fact of life?*



**A food education programme providing free, curriculum linked resources and training for teaching young people aged 3-16 years about where food comes from, cooking and healthy eating.**

[www.foodafactoflife.org.uk](http://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk)

The programme is run and managed by the British Nutrition Foundation in partnership with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB).

## What type of resources are available on *Food – a fact of life*?

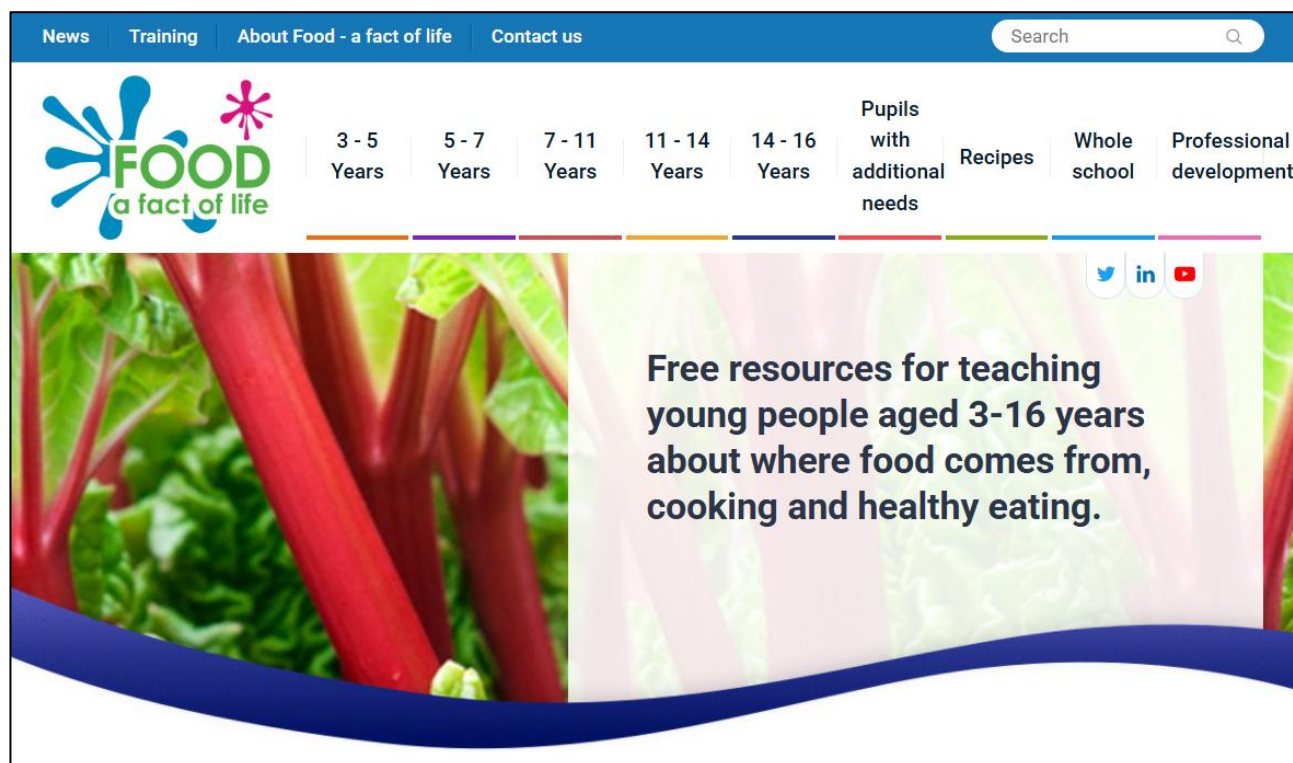


### Types of resources on the website...

- Activity ideas and notes
- Food cards
- Recipes
- Tasting guidance and charts
- Themed packs

[www.foodafactoflife.org.uk](http://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk)

# What's available on *Food – a fact of life* for early years?



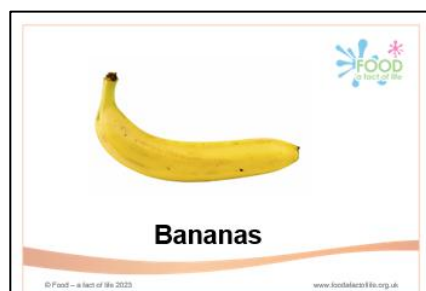
## In the 3-5 years area...

- [Healthy eating](#)
- [Cooking](#)
- [Where food comes from](#)
- [Food commodities](#)
- [Activity packs](#)

<https://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk/3-5-years/>



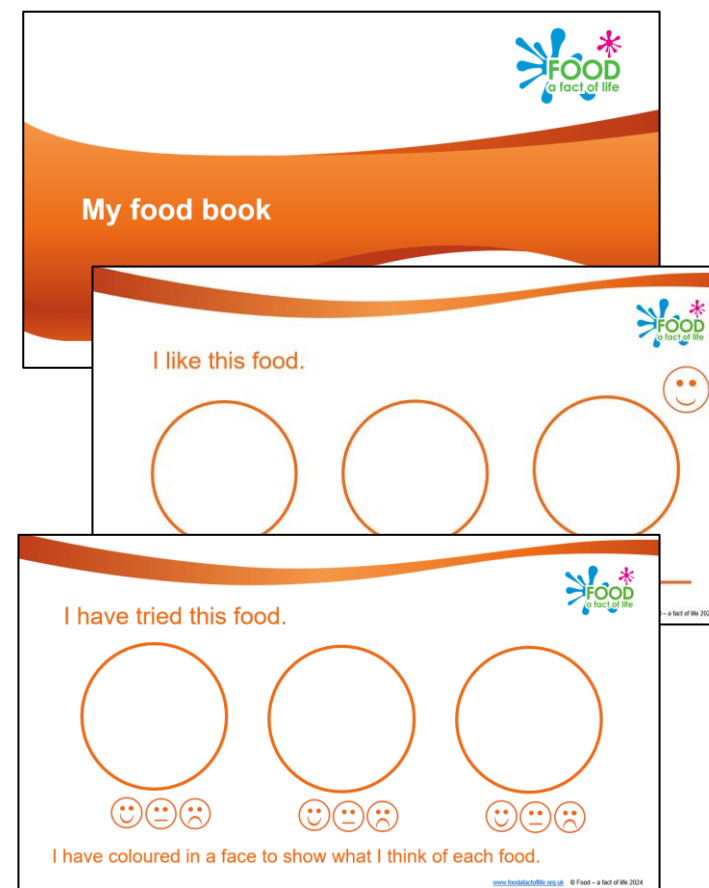
# Healthy eating resources (Choices)



Food image cards

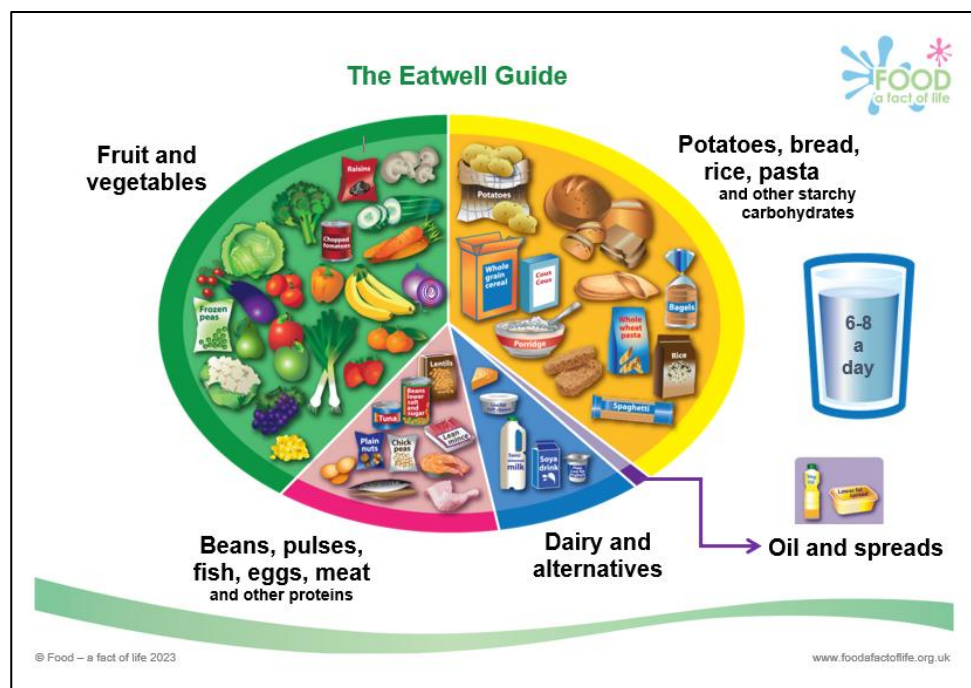


Cut and stick foods

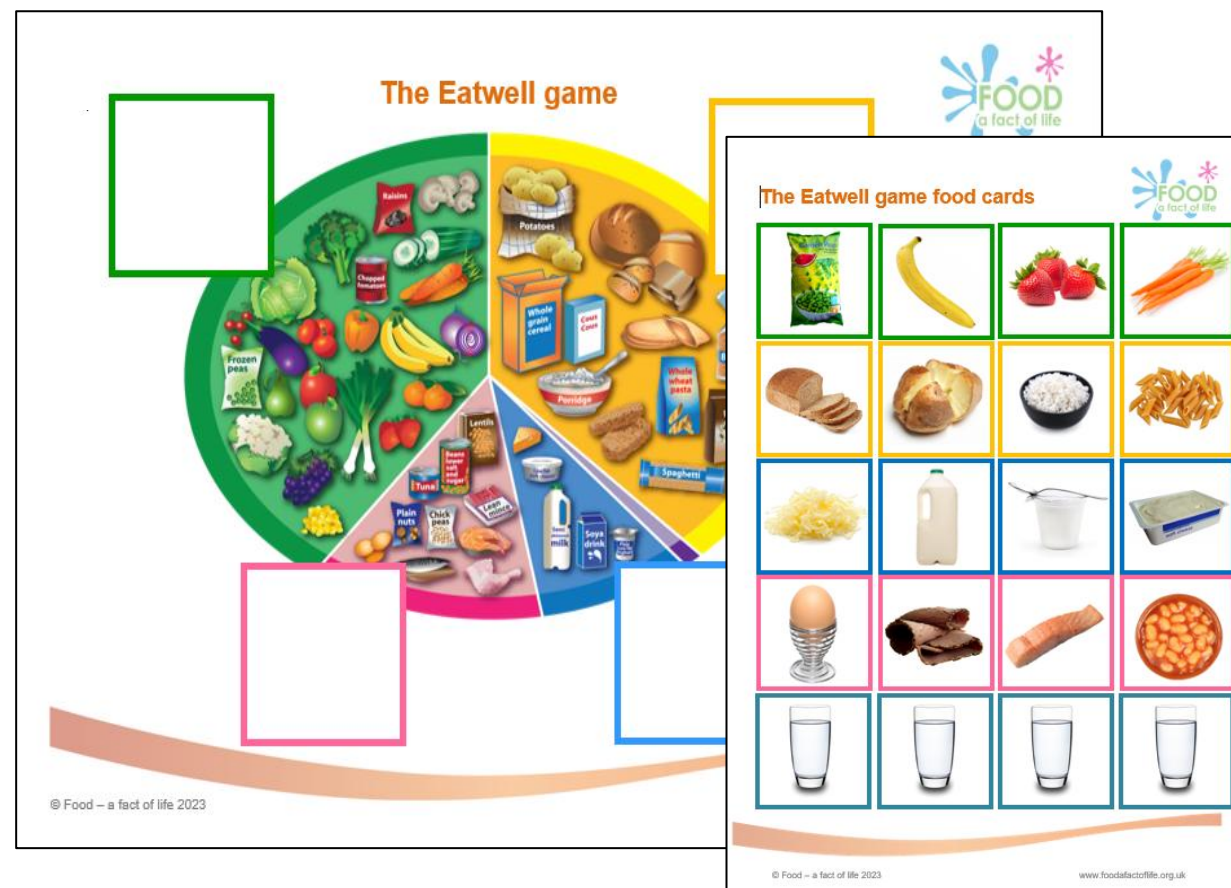


My food book

# Healthy eating resources (Eatwell Guide)



Eatwell Guide poster (simplified)



The Eatwell Guide game

# Cooking resources (Hygiene and Equipment)

Ronnie says...

Alisha and Ronnie have short sleeves.

What would they have to do if their sleeves were long?

Now we are ready to cook!

Can you remember everything we did to get ready to cook?



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Tie back long hair

Roll up long sleeves

Wash and dry hands




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Apron

Weighing scales

Measuring spoons



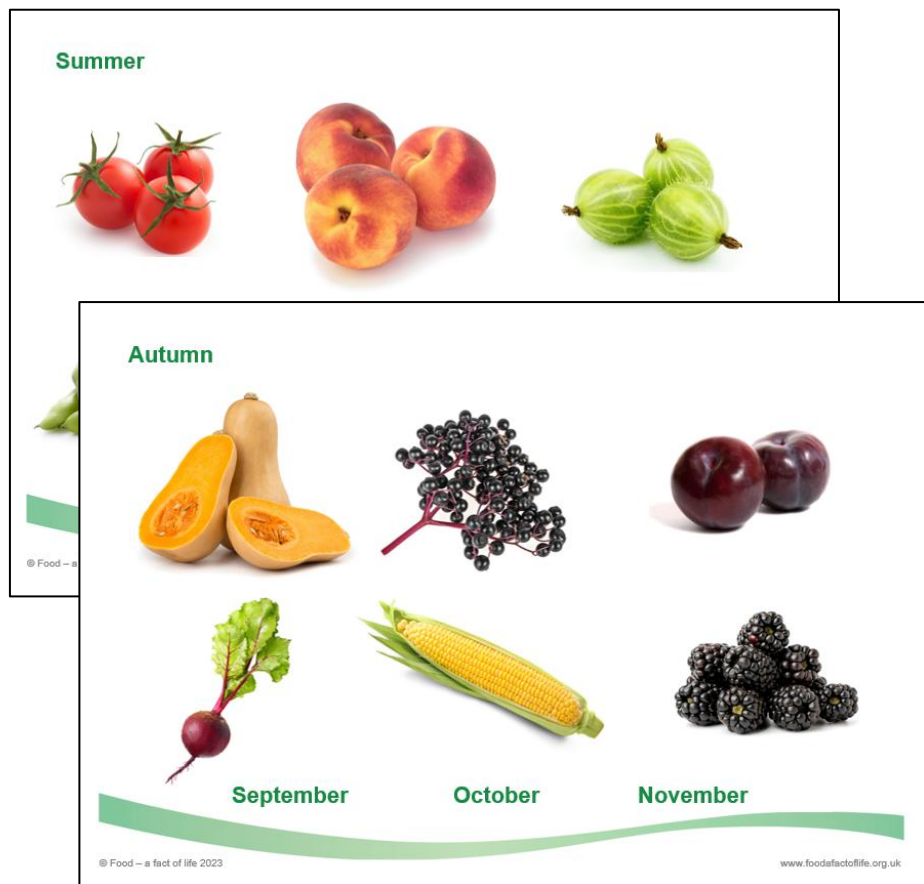
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Get ready to cook – slides and cards

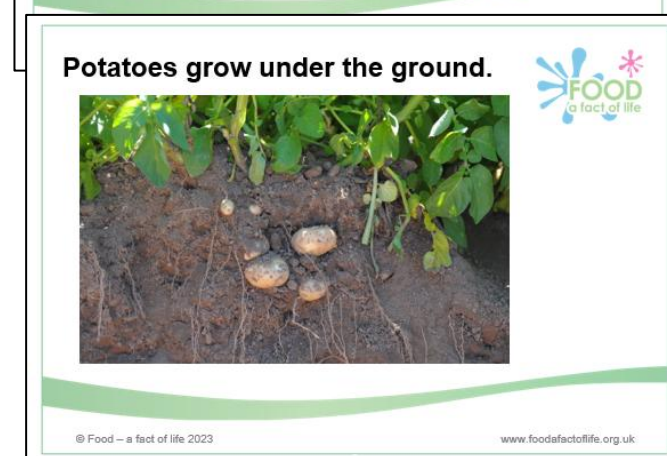
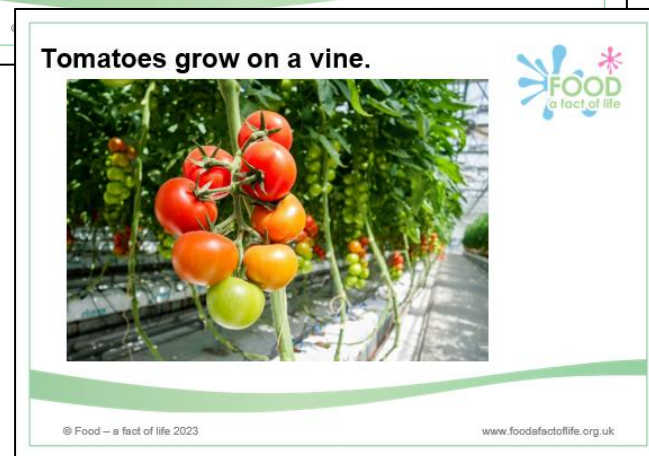
Equipment - cards and jigsaws



# Where food comes from resources (Seasons and Sorting)



Season cards



Where food comes from cards

# Activity packs (Six early years activity packs)

The six activity packs use food themes to deliver different areas of learning and development common to early years curricula around the UK.



Amazing allotments - Mathematics

Awesome activity – Physical development

Beautiful bread – Understanding the world

Delicious dairy – Expressive arts and design

Marvellous meals – Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Perfect picnic – Communication and language

# Six early years activity packs (Amazing allotments)



**Amazing allotments**

**Areas of focus**

Curriculum area	Food – a fact of life theme
Mathematics and numeracy	Where food comes from
Count to 10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name different vegetables.</li> <li>Talk about how different vegetables grow.</li> </ul>

**You will need**

- Amazing allotments presentation
- Allotment props, e.g. plant pots, a watering can, dark fabric and pegs (to create a shed)

*From the Amazing allotments presentation:*

- Allotment board (slide 19), one per child, printed
- Vegetable dice (slide 20), printed, cut out and assembled
- Dice (slide 21), printed, cut out and assembled (or use a board game dice)
- Allotment vegetable cards (slides 6-13), cut out (you may wish to print two or three sets of each vegetable so children have plenty to use to create their allotment in the imaginative play activity).
- Vegetable labels (slides 14 to 18) printed
- Optional: Certificate (slide 22)

**Listen and respond**

Show the images of allotments in the *Amazing allotments presentation* (slides 2 and 3).

Question the children:

- What can you see?
- What is this? (An allotment.)
- What happens on an allotment?
- What do you think might be growing on these allotments?
- Do any of your family or friends have an allotment?
- What could be grown on an allotment? (Fruit and vegetables.)
- Where else can vegetables be grown? (Farm, garden, windowsill.)

Show the images in the presentation of different vegetables growing (slides 4 to 8). Ask the children to name the vegetables and explain how they are growing (e.g. underground, above ground, on a vine). Count the number of vegetables in each photo with the children.

**Have a go**

This activity is designed for four children at a time. Give each child an Allotment board. One at a time, they should roll the vegetable dice and a standard dice. This will give them a vegetable and a number. They should colour the amount of the given vegetable on their allotment board. The aim is to colour all the different vegetables on their board by 'collecting them' through rolling the dice. If they roll a number higher than what they need to fill a vegetable planter, they can 'gift' the extras to another player. As an alternative to each child rolling the two dice to complete their own board, each child could take a turn rolling the two dice and all the children could colour what is thrown.

**Imaginative play**

Provide items that the children can use to set up an allotment area. You could include string to mark out planting areas, plant pots, a watering can, dark fabric and pegs (to create a shed). Provide the Allotment vegetables cards showing the five different vegetables and the

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**Allotment**

**Tomatoes**

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**Allotment board**

**Peas**

**Tomatoes**

**Asparagus**

**Carrots**

**Courgettes**

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**At home**

**Veggie count!**

Colour and count each type of vegetable. How many of each you can see?

Broccoli	<input type="checkbox"/>
Corn-on-the-cob	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pumpkin	<input type="checkbox"/>
Okra	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pepper	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Session notes

Presentation slides (images and resources)



## Stay up to date



**Education New** (monthly email update)

Sign up on the homepage:

[www.foodafactoflife.org.uk](http://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk)

**Follow us on X (Twitter)**

**@Foodafactoflife**

<https://twitter.com/foodafactoflife>

**Keep in touch:**

[c.theobald@nutrition.org.uk](mailto:c.theobald@nutrition.org.uk)



To find out more about our early years resources, view our [Early years drop in recording!](#)

# Building healthy foundations in the early years



For further information, go to:  
[www.foodafactoflife.org.uk](http://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk)

[education@nutrition.org.uk](mailto:education@nutrition.org.uk)