



Dummy, Bottle and Cup Policy

Aim

At Clare House Nursery, we understand that every child develops at their own pace and that comfort, attachment, communication and feeding are all important aspects of a child's early development. We are committed to working in line with current legislation, national guidance and evidence-based best practice, regularly reviewing our procedures to ensure they reflect the latest recommendations from the Department for Education (DfE), NHS, UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative and other recognised professional bodies.

This policy sets out how we support children in the sensitive use of dummies, bottles and cups whilst promoting speech and language development, healthy oral development, emotional wellbeing and independence. We work closely with parents and carers to ensure a consistent approach between home and nursery that reflects each child's individual needs, routines and stage of development, always keeping the child's best interests at the centre of our practice.

Dummies

We recognise that for some babies and young children a dummy provides comfort, reassurance and security, particularly during periods of transition, illness, tiredness or when settling to sleep.

However, prolonged dummy use during waking hours can reduce opportunities for children to babble, vocalise, smile, explore sounds and practise the mouth movements needed for speech and language development.

Research also shows that extended dummy use may affect oral muscle development and, over time, contribute to speech sound difficulties and dental problems.

At Clare House Nursery we will:

- Discuss each child's dummy use with parents during registration and regularly review their individual routine.
- Respect family choices whilst supporting children towards reducing dummy use during waking hours when developmentally appropriate.
- Only use dummies:
 - for comfort when a child is genuinely distressed
 - during sleep in accordance with the child's usual routine and safer sleep guidance
 - where agreed within an Individual Care Plan.
- Remove dummies once a child is settled and emotionally secure.
- Encourage children to communicate, babble, vocalise and interact without a dummy whenever possible.
- Store every dummy in an individual labelled hygienic storage container provided by parents.
- Check dummies before every use for signs of damage or wear.
- Clean or sterilise dummies immediately if dropped or contaminated.
- Never share dummies between children.
- Never attach dummies to clothing, necklaces or cords due to the risk of strangulation.
- Remove dummy clips before a child sleeps in line with our **Safer Sleep Policy**.

Supporting children to reduce dummy use

Staff will work sensitively alongside families by:

- Following an agreed consistent approach between home and nursery.
- Providing a designated place where children know their dummy is kept.
- Offering reassurance, cuddles and emotional support.
- Naming and validating children's feelings.
- Using distraction through play and meaningful experiences.
- Offering alternative comfort items such as a comforter or blanket where appropriate.
- Praising children for managing without their dummy.
- Understanding that reducing dummy use is a gradual process and each child will progress at their own pace.

Where appropriate, we will also provide parents with advice and resources to support reducing dummy use at home.

Feeding Bottles

We recognise that babies attending nursery may continue to require bottle feeds throughout the day. Bottle feeding is viewed as an important opportunity to build secure attachments between babies and their key person through warm, responsive interactions.

Wherever possible, babies will be bottle fed by their Key Person or another familiar adult to promote consistency and emotional security.

At Clare House Nursery we will:

- Always hold babies during bottle feeds.
- Never prop bottles or leave babies unattended whilst feeding.
- Feed babies responsively, following their individual feeding cues.
- Support parents' wishes regarding breast milk or formula feeding.
- Prepare bottles safely following current food hygiene guidance.
- Store and prepare expressed breast milk in accordance with NHS guidance.
- Ensure bottles only contain breast milk, infant formula or water unless otherwise advised by a healthcare professional.
- Thoroughly clean and sterilise feeding equipment where required.

Cups and Developing Independence

In line with NHS guidance, UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative and the EYFS, we encourage children to begin developing independent drinking skills from around six months of age alongside the introduction of solid foods.

At Clare House Nursery we believe introducing open cups from an early age supports:

- healthy oral development
- speech and language development
- drinking skills
- independence

- hand-eye coordination
- safer swallowing.

At Clare House Nursery we will:

- Introduce open cups from around six months of age alongside weaning, working closely with parents.
- Offer **all children, including babies**, opportunities to drink from an **open-top cup every day during snack and mealtimes**.
- Use **Doidy Cups®** to support babies and young children in developing independent drinking skills where appropriate.
- Continue to support babies individually as they develop confidence using open cups.
- Provide adult supervision and encouragement throughout mealtimes.
- Encourage children to progress from bottles to open cups at a pace appropriate to their stage of development.
- Only provide water or milk in cups unless otherwise advised by a healthcare professional.
- Encourage water throughout the day to support healthy hydration.

Children's Water Bottles

At Clare House Nursery, we encourage all children to remain well hydrated throughout the day and ask families to provide a named water bottle for their child.

To support children's health, safety and wellbeing:

- **Only fresh water** is permitted in children's personal water bottles. Juice, squash, fizzy drinks and other beverages are not allowed.
- Every water bottle **must be clearly labelled with the child's full name** to ensure it can be easily identified.
- Within our younger rooms, we also attach the **child's photograph** to their water bottle. This supports children in recognising their own belongings, promotes independence and helps to reduce the risk of bottles being shared, therefore minimising the risk of cross-contamination.
- Water bottles are stored in a designated area that is easily accessible to children throughout the day, enabling them to drink regularly.
- Staff regularly encourage children to drink water and monitor intake where appropriate.
- Parents are asked to take bottles home daily for thorough cleaning before returning them to nursery.
- If a bottle becomes damaged, dirty or is accidentally shared, staff will clean and sanitise it appropriately and inform parents where necessary.

Partnership with Parents

We recognise that feeding routines, dummy use and comfort strategies are highly individual for every family.

We will:

- Discuss routines during registration and induction.
- Respect family preferences whilst sharing current evidence-based guidance.

- Work together to support children's speech, language, emotional wellbeing and independence.
- Review routines regularly as children develop.
- Provide advice and signpost families to NHS and speech and language resources where appropriate.

Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safer Sleep Policy
- Safer Weaning Policy
- Nutrition and Healthy Eating Policy
- Oral Health Policy
- Intimate Care Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

