

# What's the DEAL?

**Nigel Denby** explains how early years settings can contribute to a government initiative designed to improve the health of the nation...



**D**o you know that as a provider of early years childcare – an organisation that produces food, employs staff and has an incredible influence over the children in your care – you are an essential member of the government's Public Health Responsibility Deal? The Responsibility Deal is the government's plan to unite the food industry, employers and key influencers to encourage us all to live healthier lives. Its principle aim is to improve public health and, chiefly, to reduce obesity. One in three of our children at Reception year is already obese or overweight, so the early years are a key period in efforts to deliver good public health outcomes. As we know, there is no single cause, effect or solution to obesity, but its consequences affect

each and every one of us, overweight or not. Obesity is crippling the UK and we can't sustain the economic or social costs for much longer.

### How does it work?

Organisations signing up to the Responsibility Deal commit to taking voluntary action to improve public health through their responsibilities as employers, as well as through their commercial actions and their community activities.

The principles and ambitions of the Deal are set out in its core commitments and supporting pledges. Signatories must first support one of the following core commitments in relation to their customers and staff:

- We recognise that we have a vital role to play in improving people's health.

- We will encourage and enable people to adopt a healthier diet.
- We will foster a culture of responsible drinking, which will help people to drink within guidelines.
- We will encourage and assist people to become more physically active.
- We will actively support our workforce to lead healthier lives.

If you can put a tick by each of these statements and go further to adopt one of the collective pledges, you can become a partner to the Responsibility Deal – it's that simple. If your organisation can't support the basic core commitments, there needs to be some serious rethinking around your values as a childcare provider and an employer!





## Collective pledges

After the core commitments, there are collective pledges covering a range of issues including, food, health at work and physical activity. The areas of 'health at work' and 'physical activity pledges' are the two most appropriate to childcare providers.

The Health at Work pledges, focus on your occupational health procedures and how your staff are supported to eat well, give up smoking or become more physically active. The specifics of the pledges are probably things that you already operate, and if there are elements that are not currently part of your health and wellbeing policy, the pledges will act as strategic guide for development. To sign up to a pledge, you can commit to reaching a target by a specific date, so if you don't meet every element now, it's easy to see where to focus your attention.

There are five Physical Activity pledges, and these offer a real opportunity for childcare providers to demonstrate a commitment to the Responsibility Deal to the wider community. They are as follows:

1. We will use our local presence to get more children and adults more active, more often, including engaging communities in planning and delivery.
2. We will contribute to the communication and promotion of the Chief Medical Officers' revised physical activity guidelines.
3. We will promote and support more active travel (walking and cycling). We will set measurable targets for this health-enhancing behaviour.
4. We will increase physical activity in the workplace, for example, through modifying

the environment, promoting workplace champions and removing barriers to physical activity during the working day.

5. We will tackle the barriers to participation in physical activity faced by some of the most inactive groups in society.

Demonstrating your commitment to these pledges could involve liaising with local leisure facilities to provide parents and toddlers fitness classes, a walk or cycle to nursery campaign for staff and parents, or simply inviting parents in for group play sessions with their children. The possibilities are endless.

## Food pledges

While the food pledges are principally designed to be adopted by food manufacturers, retailers and caterers, they can and will have a direct impact on childcare providers. The food pledges focus on...

- making the calorie content of foods easier to find;
- the removal of trans fats;
- the reduction of salt in foods.

In effect, this means that you will be able to access reduced salt and trans fat-free products more easily. Everyone who has signed up to the pledges is listed on the Responsibility Deal website.

The salt content of every day ingredients is a key concern when it comes to planning menus and recipes for children. At Grub4life.org.uk we regularly receive enquiries from nursery cooks trying to source reduced salt stock cubes, cereals, breads and a whole range of other ingredients. By simply logging onto the salt reduction pages of the Responsibility Deal website, [tinyurl.com/TNsaltred](http://tinyurl.com/TNsaltred), you can see the 70 plus companies who have signed up to this specific pledge. The targets for salt reduction span all categories of foods and have recently been updated to be around 15 per cent lower than those reached back in 2010.

Most of the main supermarkets have signed up to the food pledges, and we know a lot of settings use supermarkets over wholesalers to buy groceries. By signing up to the Responsibility Deal salt reduction

## find out more

Grub4life is a training resource and an online community dedicated to improving food and nutrition standards for children in childcare. If you would like support with your food and nutrition provision, or advice on how you can get involved with supporting the Responsibility Deal, contact [nigel@grub4life.com](mailto:nigel@grub4life.com), who will put you in touch with other childcare providers making a difference - responsibly.

pledge, a supermarket will be looking to reduce salt across its own label range; the big brands will be responsible for their own salt reduction targets. So, if you know your supermarket is part of the Deal, have a look at their own label baked beans, bread or cereals before you reach for the big brands.

For those providers who want to stay ahead of the game and go the extra mile, there is scope to sign up the food pledges yourselves:

- Children attending nursery full time receive most of their meals in your care; you are therefore a caterer and qualify.
- Knowing the nutritional value of the meals provided in the setting enables you to show calorie content, salt content and also whether the food you provide is trans fat-free.

Grub4life works with a number of nurseries, nursery groups and local authorities to enable this. These providers wanted to ensure their food provision met and exceeded the recently introduced School Food Trust guidance for food and drink served in early years settings. We worked with them to provide...

- food and nutrition training for cooks and staff;
- food and nutrition policies to help settings manage all aspects of their food provision, including ingredient procurement;
- nutritionally balanced, rotational, seasonal menus;
- portion controlled recipes which have all been nutritionally analysed.

By default, this work provides these providers with everything they need to meet the Responsibility Deal food pledges, and a number of these groups are currently applying to become Responsibility Deal partners via the food pledges.

At first view, this might seem a huge task, and in some cases it is, but we have provided a wide range of resources and guidance, which can be accessed via [Grub4life.org.uk](http://Grub4life.org.uk) free of charge to help providers produce their own food and nutrition policy. There's also a huge archive of downloadable recipes and menus, which have been tried and tested on over 40,000 children under five.

