

Food safety culture: what it looks like in practice

1. An introduction to food safety culture

Food safety culture is how everyone in your business, from owners and managers to food handlers, kitchen staff, servers, cleaners and temporary/agency staff, thinks about and carries out food safety every day. It reflects the values, attitudes, and behaviours that keep food safe, whether people are being observed or not. A strong food safety culture helps prevent problems before they happen and keeps customers safe every day.

Think of food safety culture as a team effort. Everyone needs to work together to keep food safe. This means knowing what can go wrong, talking to each other, and making sure that everyone feels comfortable about highlighting and reporting problems.

Food Safety Culture is “the way we do things here”, even when no one is watching.

2. How to build a food safety culture that fits your business

An effective food safety culture means everyone in your business understands the importance of food safety and works together to keep food safe, from delivery through to preparation, cooking, service, and sale. It is more than following rules, it is about building good practices, clear communication, shared responsibility, and it is required by food law.

Food safety culture is not one size fits all.

How a business develops and maintains its food safety culture should reflect its size, nature and the activities it carries out. Different risks and working practices mean some businesses will need to place greater emphasis on certain areas than others.

For example, a coffee shop with high staff turnover or language barriers may need to place extra emphasis on clear communication, visual aids and closer supervision to ensure these food safety requirements are consistently followed.

Using the Safe Catering Pack to support food safety culture

Using your Safe Catering Pack properly and making sure it reflects what actually happens in your business helps you build and demonstrate a strong food safety culture.

This pack should:

- 1 Be **tailored to your business** and day to day activities. It should show how food safety is managed in practice. All steps, such as cooking, chilling, cleaning and storage, should be identified and the relevant sections of the pack completed. If you introduce new or higher risk activities (for example sushi, fermenting, sous vide or vacuum packing), these should be added to the Pack using the "Other Steps" section. Daily checks, cleaning schedules and temperature records (SC1–SC9) should be used to show how these controls are monitored
- 2 Be **kept up to date**. Review it regularly, and whenever there are changes to menus, equipment, suppliers, processes or staff roles. This helps ensure food safety controls remain effective during busy periods or when things change.
- 3 Be **actively used and supported by managers**. Managers should lead by example, making food safety the top priority, explaining not only what staff need to do, but why food safety controls matter and ensuring staff understand the 'why' behind each step. Regular conversation about food safety should take place with staff and staff should feel comfortable raising concerns or reporting problems, such as incorrect temperatures or equipment issues, without fear of blame.
- 4 Support **training, supervision and record keeping**. Use it to help train new staff and refresh knowledge for existing staff on key topics such as personal hygiene, cross contamination, allergens, temperature control and cleaning. Supervision should be used to check that procedures are understood and followed. Records such as training logs, temperature checks, cleaning records and corrective actions help show that food safety is taken seriously and support continual improvement. This includes ensuring food safety procedures are followed consistently by all staff, at all times, whether or not managers are present, and that responsibilities for each task are clearly understood.
- 5 Highlight the importance of **providing the right resources**. Managers should ensure staff have the time, equipment, cleaning materials and authority they need to keep food safe, including suitable hand washing facilities, adequate fridge space, safe chemical storage and the ability to stop a process if something goes wrong.

Accurate record-keeping helps you comply with food law and show that food safety is being taken seriously. You should:

- keep training records (see SC6, section 5, page 8) for each staff member, including dates and topics covered;
- maintain daily records, such as delivery, temperature and cleaning checks, and any corrective actions taken;
- conduct regular hygiene and allergen checks and complete the Hygiene Inspection Checklist (SC5, section 5, page 6).

These records help protect your customers and show inspectors and others that food safety is a top priority in your business.

Food safety culture assessment

A self-assessment questionnaire is provided to help you assess your food safety culture. The assessment should be completed by the business owner, manager or supervisor with responsibility for food safety, but it should be informed by staff input, for example through discussions with food handlers and servers (note in the comments/ evidence column). The assessment should be carried out regularly, for example once a year, and should be reviewed whenever there are significant changes, such as new staff, new menu items, equipment issues, or if a food safety issue is identified, including concerns raised by customers or staff.

Food safety culture assessment		Yes	No	Comments/evidence
1	Do managers stay involved and care about keeping food safe, even during busy times or when things change (for example during staff shortages, when new ingredients are introduced, if there is broken equipment etc.)?			
2	Do managers help staff work together to keep food safe? (For example, do managers encourage staff to speak up if they see a food safety risk and thank them for doing so? Do managers regularly provide time for staff to discuss food safety?)			
3	Do staff know the importance of their role in protecting customers and keeping food safe through visual aids/training, daily food safety reminders, observations and feedback?			
4	Is everyone aware of what to do and who to tell if there's a food safety problem and what steps to take (for example, if food is not cooked right or is stored incorrectly, or pest activity is noted, do staff take action and tell the manager straight away)? Staff should know that if they see something , they should say something .			
5	Does the business have what is needed (such as sufficient staff, equipment and cleaning supplies) to keep food safe (for example, space for safe storage, including chilled foods/enough sanitiser for cleaning)?			
6	Does everyone know their food safety role within the business so that checks can be done on time, and records kept accurate and up to date? (For example, staff are shown how to monitor and accurately record cooking temperatures, and a manager/supervisor knows how to check that the records are completed and correct.)			
7	Does the food business ask staff for ideas, listen to their feedback, and acknowledge them when they help improve food safety?			
Date:				
Time:				
Name:				
Role:				