

LET'S TALK ABOUT FOOD in Elementary School



Children and youth are curious about their world. When you respond to questions about food, focus on their interests and keep discussions neutral and respectful. By approaching these conversations with curiosity, we can promote a healthier relationship with food that can have lasting positive outcomes.¹



How to Start the Conversation

IF A STUDENT...	RATHER THAN...	CONSIDER...
Brings a juice box for snack	Labelling the food as “unhealthy,” “sometimes food,” or “junk food,” <i>“It’s okay to drink juice sometimes but not every day.”</i>	Not commenting with a value judgement about the food. Speaking about all foods in an inclusive way can promote a respectful and positive food environment in your classroom. <i>“I see you brought juice in your snack today. Is apple your favourite flavour? Do you need help unwrapping your straw?”</i>
Says “Yuck! That food is gross”	Encouraging students to try a food or convincing them they might like it, <i>“How can you not like this food? It’s so yummy!”</i>	A neutral response that supports the student’s role and demonstrates behaviour expectations. Staying calm also makes the word “yuck” lose its power. <i>“It sounds like you don’t want this food right now. Let’s pass it along.”</i>
Eats very slowly or is still eating when the mealtime is coming to an end	Rushing the student to eat faster, <i>“Hurry up, the meal is almost over.”</i>	Letting students know in advance what to expect during mealtime routines. Tell students how much time is left and ask if they need any help before the meal ends. <i>“We have a few more minutes to eat. Is there anything I can help you with?”</i>

IF A STUDENT...	RATHER THAN...	CONSIDER...
<p>Demonstrates distracting behaviour (e.g., throwing food, standing on their chair)</p>	<p>Reprimanding the student for their behaviour,</p> <p><i>“Don’t be naughty!”</i></p>	<p>Acknowledging that students engage in distracting behaviours for many reasons. Calmly respond to make the behaviour less interesting and to set expectations for mealtime behaviour.</p> <p><i>“It makes me think you’re finished eating when you throw food. Is that right?”</i></p> <p><i>“I see that you are finished eating. Let’s put your lunch box away and get ready to go outside.”</i></p>
<p>Asks, “What is healthy eating?”</p>	<p>Talking about health as the result of personal choices,</p> <p><i>“Healthy eating is part of a healthy lifestyle. That’s when we choose foods that are full of nutrients and get lots of exercise.”</i></p>	<p>Being mindful that health is influenced by a variety of social factors, including income, education, and access to health care. Many factors that influence health may be out of one’s control.</p> <p><i>“Healthy eating is more than the type and amount of food we eat. It is different for different people, depending on what your body needs, what is available, and what you enjoy eating.”</i></p>
<p>Comments that a certain food being discussed or explored is “bad” for you</p>	<p>Categorizing foods in a lesson as “good” or “bad,”</p> <p><i>“You’re right, chocolate is bad for you and we should only eat it occasionally.”</i></p>	<p>Continuing to provide opportunities to learn about and prepare many different foods at school.</p> <p><i>“What makes you say that? Sometimes we eat foods because we enjoy how they taste. Our bodies need lots of different foods to grow, think, and play. Let’s continue our food exploration activity.”</i></p>

We are all on a learning journey with our language around food and eating. Thank you for prioritizing a positive classroom environment for your students. There is always more to learn. Let us know how we can support you by emailing us at albertanutrition@dfc-plc.ca.

1 Satter, E. Eating competence: nutrition education with the Satter eating competence model. *J Nutr Educ Behav* 2007;39(5):S189-S194.