

Table TALK

CREATING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR ENJOYING NUTRITION AND FUN EARLY FOOD EXPERIENCES

Meal and snack times are a great time to explore new foods, develop social skills, and learn about different cultures and people. Food can be a great topic for discussion and exploring. The discussions that educators have with children are a key learning strategy relating to wellbeing and building their self help skills.

Food related discussions help children become confident and involved with food. These discussions also help build their sense of identity.

Be Sensitive

It is important not to single out children for unhealthy lunches or snacks. Educators need to consider the realities for families. Food security, skills, allergies as well as cultural practices can impact on children and their families. And sometimes families just have a challenging week. Start small and build with small steps with positive encouragement and support for parents and carers.



Ideas to build food acceptance

Research has demonstrated that children often need multiple exposures to a food before it is accepted. It may take 15 to 20 times of tasting a food before a food is accepted. Food discussions can be part of this learning process.

- "Sometimes it takes a few tastes of a new food before you like it"
- "Your taste buds might need to grow some more before you like it"
- Praise them when they try something new, even if it isn't accepted
 - "I like that you tried that carrot. I am proud of you for trying"
- Make food fun - spinach pasta meal could be called 'Alien Pasta' if children enjoy learning about space
- Get kids to help with food preparation -- the more opportunities they have to handle a food the more they will learn to accept it
- Allow children to choose the foods they want on their plate. If they don't choose a new food, encourage them to at least try it and that it's OK if they don't like it this time



Role modelling by Educators

Children are smart and they watch what Educators do. When children see educators eating healthy foods and enjoying them, they are more likely to try it themselves.

If an educator has a strong dislike for what is being served:-

- “Don’t be rude to food” - if you like something then talk it up, but if you don’t keep it to yourself.
- Focus on the positives rather than the negatives.
- Challenge yourself to try something new - “Even though I have not had this before, I am going to try it as well”
- Give the children examples of ways your taste for foods have changed eg “I didn’t use to like celery but I really like it now”



Don't tell them it's healthy!

While we know eating a healthy diet most of the time will keep us healthy, it isn’t a good motivator for children (or adults). We tend to eat foods because they taste good, they are fun, smell delicious or they look attractive. Some ideas to help grow their understanding of the importance of eating everyday foods most of the time include (and these can be tailored down to an individual food item such as broccoli):-

- Vegetables help you to run fast
- Did you know if you have one green vegetable everyday it will make you stronger and smarter?
- The cook has made a special 'Power Meal' to help you have extra fun on the weekend
- I've eaten my beans so I am going to jump even higher today
- Grainy bread helps you to be smart! It gives you lasting energy so you can concentrate
- Change the name of the foods—such as “brainy grainy bread”
- Fruit is nature's lollies
- Because everyone has been so good at packing away, let's have some power vegies as a special treat
- Chips won't make you strong. If you want to be strong you need to eat more vegies
- Milk/cheese or yoghurt gives you strong bones for climbing and playing
- I am going to choose a rainbow of colours on my plate for lunch today
- Explain how your tastebuds are a bit like brains - brains are smart and learning new things all the time, just like your taste buds. They just need to try the foods a few times first.

