

Enjoyable Lunchtimes

National Lunchbox Week

Our fact sheets provide plenty of tips and ideas to create positive, enjoyable and nourishing lunchboxes.

Supporting Positive Lunchtime Experiences

By creating a supportive environment, teachers and educators can play a key role in fostering a positive relationship with food for children. Consider the following ways you can support positive lunchtime experiences for children at your school or early years service.

Avoid judging lunchboxes

- Focus on creating a non-judgemental and inclusive space where children feel comfortable with the food in their lunchbox.
- Refrain from commenting on the contents of a child's lunchbox.
- Great news - it's one less thing you have to do!

Be a role model

- When children see adults eating meals, they're inspired to follow suit.
- When possible, eat your own nourishing lunch or snacks where children can see you.

Foster social connections

- Use lunchtime as an opportunity for positive interactions.
- Encourage children to enjoy their lunch together as a social experience.

Encourage intuitive eating

- Children's internal sense of appetite is stronger than adults.
- Promote intuitive eating by supporting children to listen to their hunger and fullness cues.
- Allow children to choose how much, and in what order, to eat from their lunchbox.

Create an enjoyable eating environment

- Help create an environment where eating is enjoyable and not rushed.
- Offer opportunities for children to eat at tables or seated areas and provide enough time for them to sit and enjoy their lunch.

Communicate positively with families

- Avoid sending notes home about lunchbox contents.
- Share helpful tips, ideas, and encouragement through newsletters or social media that reach all families.

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Tailoring Lunchboxes

All children's feeding journeys are unique, which means their lunchboxes will often look different. By understanding where a child is in their food journey, we can help them grow and thrive. Here are some tips to help adapt lunchboxes for some different types of sensory needs and preferences.

Sensory seekers

- Children who explore the world with all their senses, often seeking big flavours and textures.
- Include foods with big textures like crunchy crackers, carrots and apples, chewy dried fruits, or roasted chickpeas.
- Try offering big flavours like foods that are pickled or have herbs, spices or flavourful dips.

Sensory avoiders

- Children seek mild flavours, consistent textures and may prefer food that is separated. They might not like touching food with their bare hands.
- Use bento style lunchboxes to keep foods separated.
- Include utensils to help pick up food like a fork, spoon, chopsticks, or food picks.

Timid taste buds

- Children are still learning flavours and textures. They may gradually build confidence to explore new foods.
- Always include some familiar, 'safe foods' that are known to be enjoyed.
- Pack a small amount of 'new' or still learning food for exposure. It doesn't matter if it isn't eaten.

Dry sippers

- Children might need some extra motivation or reminders to drink their water.
- Include ice cubes and use insulated drink bottles to keep water cool.
- Experiment with different spouts or straw bottles that make drinking easier and fun.
- Add a squeeze of fresh lemon or orange for a flavour twist.

Being respectful of children's diverse needs includes recognising that every child and every lunchbox is different...don't compare!

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Positive Food Language

How we TALK about food shapes how children THINK about food and their relationship with food. Try these approaches that can help support positive food relationships.

JUDGEMENTS VS ALL FOODS FIT

- Labels like 'healthy/unhealthy', or 'good/bad', reduces food to moral judgements.
- Celebrate all foods for their role in fuelling our bodies, supporting growth - beyond labels of 'healthy' or 'unhealthy'.

OPINIONS VS FACTS

- Describing foods as 'yummy' or 'nice' are opinions, and opinions not always shared by everyone.
- Instead, use factual describing words, like crunchy, juicy, cold, savoury, or sweet!

MANY WAYS TO LEARN

- There are many ways to explore foods beyond just tasting them.
- Some children, especially those with timid taste buds, might be more comfortable exploring new foods with their eyes, nose, ears, or hands.
- Try talking about how you like to explore new foods, or describe what you notice using your senses!

Being respectful of children's needs includes being responsive to different ways of eating along their feeding journey!

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Lunchbox Tips for the School Transition

School lunchboxes can be a big change for children starting school. Here are some ideas to make the transition easier.

Check containers are easy to open

Check that children are able to open the containers and packets that you put in their lunchbox. Some can be tricky!

Practice before school starts

Try packing morning tea and lunch in a lunchbox to help children get used to selecting foods from their lunchbox.

Getting kids involved

Some kids have ideas on what they would like in their lunchbox. Some also like to help prepare and pack it.

Practice mealtimes

In the weeks before school starts it can help to have meals at set times to get your little one used to it. Creating a social environment with other children can help too.

Talk about food safety

Where food is not stored in a fridge and only has an ice pack, explain which foods would be good to eat first. E.g. cheese, yoghurt, meat or eggs.

Lunchbox leftovers

Some days the lunchbox will hardly be touched, other days it will come home empty. Children's internal sense of appetite is stronger than adults. Trust they will make up for it at other meals.

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Lunchbox Notes

Brighten your child's day by adding these to their lunchbox for a nice surprise!

Always proud of you!

Enjoy your meal!

Be amazing today!

Have a fun day!

You've got this!

Good luck today!

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