

School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School



Purpose of this Toolkit: to help educators and school administrators create a supportive food environment at school and in classrooms with knowledge, helpful tips, and resources.

Creating a supportive food environment at school can enhance the health and well-being of students, staff, and the community. Studies show that promoting health and well-being improves learning, attendance, and the mental health of students. Supported students are better learners!

To build a supportive food environment at school, our current approach must change. We know that past strategies focused on lowering body weight and getting students to choose healthy foods have stigmatized some foods, body types, and people. This has negatively impacted student's relationships with food and how they view their own bodies.



Schools play a key role to help students have a good relationship with food and a positive body image. A **supportive food environment at school**, where the food culture and activities reflect positive messages and practices, shows young people how food supports their physical, social, and mental well-being, and influences attitudes and behaviours that will last a lifetime.

In this Toolkit

INTRODUCTION: Supportive Food Environments at School 2

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

- Tips for Talking About Food in the Classroom and Lunchroom 3
- Activity Ideas to Create a Food Neutral Classroom and School 4
- Activities to Explore Food at School that are Outside the “Lunch-Box” 5
- Additional Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning Resources 6

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

- Policies, Guidelines and Funding for School Food Programs 7
- Assess Your School’s Current Food Environment 8
 - FOOD ENVIRONMENT SURVEY FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS 8
 - FOOD ENVIRONMENT SURVEY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS 12

Please give us your feedback on this toolkit to help us make it better!
Take our [brief survey](#).

Questions about the toolkit or feedback survey? Call the Healthy Schools Hotline at **519-258-2146 ext. 1555** or email csh@wechu.org



School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

INTRODUCTION: SUPPORTIVE FOOD ENVIRONMENTS AT SCHOOL

What is a Supportive Food Environment at School? Why is it Important?

A **supportive food environment** at school makes it easy for students to eat well, builds positive relationships with food, and can be achieved through actions within your control. *For example:*



- Foods offered and sold at school are nutritious and available to all students.
- School celebrations, fundraisers or rewards use incentives that are not foods.
- Exploring different foods through cross-curriculum activities or hands-on experiences.
- Using “food neutral” language to talk about food without labels of “good” or “bad.”

As knowledge around school-based nutrition is evolving, how we approach it must also change. Over the past 30 years, strategies have focused on lowering body weight and getting children and youth to choose healthy foods. While good intentioned, this approach has hurt the ability for many to have positive relationships with food, and disordered eating rates have risen.

How a Food Neutral Approach Builds a Supportive Food Environment

Using a “**food neutral**” approach ensures all parts of eating (from what is taught in the classroom, to where, when and what foods are consumed) are free of judgement, shame, stigma, and personal bias or beliefs. When we stop labelling food as “good,” “bad,” “healthy” or “unhealthy,” we remove any judgments about foods and the people eating them. Instead, all foods are viewed in the same way, no matter their nutritional value.

Being **food neutral** does not make foods equal in nutritional value (a cupcake does not have the same nutrition as an apple), but it is essential for creating positive relationships with food, where children and youth are empowered to enjoy a variety of foods, without guilt or shame.

While all foods are not nutritionally the same, they should all be free of judgment, shame, stigma, and personal bias or beliefs.

A **supportive food environment** at school with a **food neutral approach** encourages positive eating behaviours, such as eating together and honouring when someone feels hungry or full. It also respects foods brought from home and individual food choices and preferences. These actions can improve mental health and well-being and build positive relationships with food.

🍏 *For more information, see [Creating a positive food environment in schools \(français\)](#), [What is Food Neutrality?](#) (English only), and [Canada’s Food Guide \(français\)](#)*






School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

Tips for Talking About Food in the Classroom and Lunchroom

Call foods by their names:

		
	Healthy Fruit	Apple
	Junk Food	Candy
	Treat	Cupcake

Food labels to AVOID:


Good or bad
Healthy or unhealthy
Treats or junk food
Sometimes or everyday foods

Do NOT comment on foods brought to school.

- Do not criticize students' lunches and snacks.
- Avoid praising students for eating certain foods or trying something new.
- Let students follow hunger and fullness cues and take their time eating. Accept that they can eat their food in the order they choose.
- Be mindful of what you say about YOUR food choices, and your body, in front of students.

Understand WHY children may eat certain foods, such as:

- Family traditions or cultural heritage
- The seasons and food available
- Individual food budgets or convenience
- Personal tastes and preferences
- Allergies, or other factors

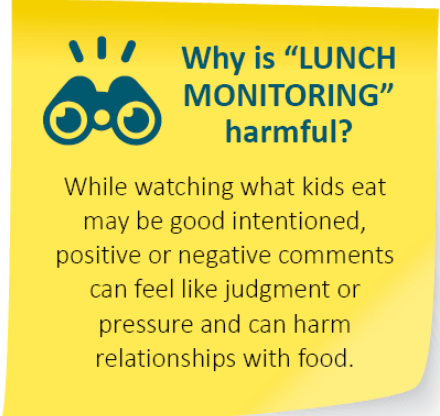
Follow these ROLES FOR EATING AT SCHOOL from Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility (English only)

SCHOOL	➔ When and where to eat. Which foods are offered if sold or provided.
STUDENT	➔ Whether to eat, how much to eat, the order in which foods are eaten.
CAREGIVER	➔ What food to pack.



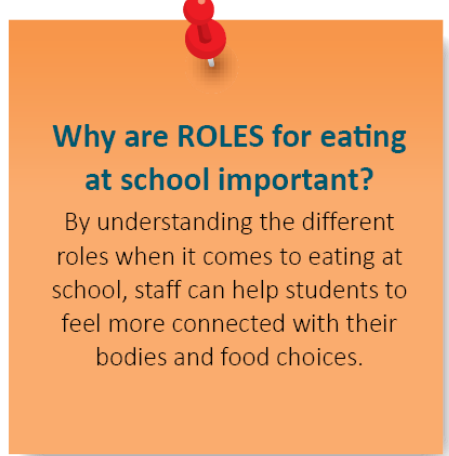
Why NOT label foods?

When foods are labelled- positively or negatively- young people may transfer those feelings to themselves. It can affect their relationship with food and their own bodies.

Why is "LUNCH MONITORING" harmful?

While watching what kids eat may be good intentioned, positive or negative comments can feel like judgment or pressure and can harm relationships with food.



Why are ROLES for eating at school important?



By understanding the different roles when it comes to eating at school, staff can help students to feel more connected with their bodies and food choices.

School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

Activity Ideas to Create a Food Neutral Classroom and School

Make school CELEBRATIONS food neutral

	Non-food event ideas		For younger birthdays, let the birthday student:
Plan a class game		Be “class leader” for the day with special jobs (e.g., deliver things to the office, pick the story time book)	
Give extra recess time		Wear a special crown, badge, or button	
Have an assembly with a fun guest speaker		Lead a class craft activity	
Have a dress-down or themed dress-up day			




What if we DO include foods in school events?

Make sure any supplied food supports school board policies (i.e., PPM 150, allergies, etc.).

If you have any questions, call the Healthy Schools Hotline at **519-258-2146 ext. 1555** or email csh@wechu.org

 For more ideas, see [Rethink Celebrations \(français\)](#)

Rethink REWARDS

	Ideas to recognize good behaviour or academic success with non-food rewards
Give school supplies (pencil, eraser, bookmark, sticker)	
Morning announcements, school assemblies or postings to the school social media site	
Make a card, letter, or certificate of achievement	
Give free time or an activity of the student’s choice	
Extra gym time, longer recess, or play a special game	



What if we choose to FUNDRAISE with food?

Choose foods from *Canada’s Food Guide* that increase access and availability to nutritious foods. See [Fresh from the Farm: Healthy Fundraising for Ontario Schools](#) to raise money with fresh produce and support Ontario farmers.

 See [Rethink Rewards \(français\)](#) for more suggestions.

Use non-food FUNDRAISERS at school

Try physical activity fundraisers like “walk-a-thons,” school dances or yoga	Sell raffle tickets for gift cards or local services (e.g., grocery gift card, spa service)
Host family events for a small fee (e.g., movie night, bingo, a sporting event)	Host a rummage sale with donated used books, sports equipment, and clothing


 For more tips and ideas, see [Fantastic Fundraising \(français\)](#)

School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School


Activities to Explore Food at School that are Outside the “Lunch-Box”

Connect food to CURRICULUM!

 Students can use and learn about food across subjects by studying:	
Procedural writing by listing out steps in a recipe	Measurement, volume, or fractions in math by measuring out ingredients in a recipe
Reading skills by reading a recipe	Growing food as a science project
Graphing skills in math by surveying student’s favourite fruit choice	Social study research to learn the importance of foods to different cultures

🍏 For more ideas, see resources and lesson plans for [Children and Youth \(français\)](#).

COOK up some fun!

 Cooking gives students opportunities to:	
Try new foods	Practice working together
Develop food preparation skills	Form positive memories of cooking and eating together

🍏 Consider offering the [You're the Chef](#) cooking program in your school. Also see [Grants and Funding Opportunities](#) for support providing other hands-on programs.



Interested in the You're the Chef cooking program?

Get more information and register for an upcoming class. Call the Healthy Schools Hotline at **519-258-2146 ext. 1555** or email csh@wechu.org

More ways to BUILD POSITIVE CONNECTIONS and food experiences

- Help students explore foods by colour, texture, shape, smell, and taste (ensure taste tests are no pressure!).
- [Grow a school garden](#) (English only) or [classroom garden \(français\)](#)
- Explore traditional foods and culture from the community.
- Provide a pleasant eating environment by turning off phones, tv and computer screens.
- Find opportunities for staff and students to eat together.
- Encourage connectedness and belonging through any events that bring students, staff, and families together.

🍏 For more ideas, see [Eating With Others \(français\)](#), [Healthy Eating at School \(français\)](#), and [Canada's Food Guide Toolkit for Educators \(français\)](#)



What about BEVERAGES in the classroom?

Help students to stay hydrated throughout the day. Encourage them to bring a reusable water bottle and allow access to water at their desks.


School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School





Additional Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning Resources

Resources for Educators

The resources below will support educators to understand nutrition-related issues and create comprehensive lesson plans to cover curriculum-based nutrition.

GRADE	RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
K-12	Mental Health and Weight Bias in Schools (français)	Educator resource to understand weight bias and ways to promote body positivity.
K-8	Teaching and Talking About Food and Nutrition (English only)	Food and nutrition exploration approaches for educators.
K-8	Teach Food First (English only)	A toolkit with tips, resources, and lesson plans to explore <i>Canada's Food Guide</i> . Also contains First Nations Traditional Foods lesson plans.
K-8	Food Neutral Classroom Posters (English only - available for a fee)	Food neutral classroom posters to foster healthy relationships with food and bodies.
K-12	Nurturing Healthy Eaters in Elementary Schools (français) or Secondary Schools (français)	Tips for supporting students to have a healthy relationship with food and their bodies.
K-12	Food and Nutrition (WECHU)  <i>Click the ear icon on the top right corner of the page to translate into other languages</i>	Information and resources for promoting food literacy and positive body image for educators, parents/caregivers, and students.

Resources for Families

-  [Food Banks in Windsor-Essex County \(français\)](#): Emergency Food Services
-  [Healthy Eating at School \(français\)](#) and [School Lunch Your Kids Will Munch \(français\)](#): tips for families on packing food for the school day.
-  [Mealtime Conversation Starters \(English only\)](#): An activity for educators and families to enhance the experience of eating together
-  [10 tips to help your child have a positive relationship with food and their body \(français\)](#)

Want to STAY UPDATED with the latest resources and guidance?

[Sign up](#) for the WECHU School Health Newsletter to receive monthly tips and information about nutrition and other school programs. For more information, call the School Health Hotline at **519-258-2146 ext. 1555** or email csh@wechu.org



School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Policies, Guidelines and Funding for School Food Programs

The School Food and Beverage Policy (PPM150)

The [School Food and Beverage Policy \(PPM150\) \(français\)](#) requires food and beverages offered for sale in Ontario’s publicly funded elementary and secondary schools comply with certain nutrition standards. For a list of approved vendors, contact your School Board or the Healthy Schools Program (519-258-2146 ext. 1555 or csh@wechu.org).

The Student Nutrition Program (SNP) Guidelines

The [Student Nutrition Program Guidelines \(français\)](#) is a tool to ensure that food and beverages offered at school through the SNP meet nutritional standards for meal and snack programs.

🍏 *Have questions? Consultation with nutrition staff at the WECHU is available upon request. Contact the Healthy Schools Program at 519-258-2146 ext. 1555 or csh@wechu.org.*

Grants and Funding Opportunities

Schools looking for complimentary funding can consider numerous opportunities to support their nutrition programs and initiatives, such as:

Ontario Student Nutrition Program (English only)	Funding and program support for Ontario Student Nutrition Programs in the Southwest Region.
TD Friends of the Environment Foundation Grant (français)	Applications accepted year-round for environmental education programs, such as school yard greening, community gardens, and more.
President’s Choice – Power Full Kids™ (français)	Funding and support for educators to teach kids to grow and cook food. Those enrolled can also access the Equipment Fund.
Whole Kids Foundation (English only)	Offers a variety of grants to help kids eat better such as The Garden Grant Program, The Bee Grant Program, Canadian Farm to School Grant.
Walmart Community Giving (français)	Funding for programs to build and support communities, such as hunger relief or food insecurity, food access, healthy eating, and building strong communities.
Garden-based Grants for Schools & Non-Profits (English only)	List of additional grants available to schools and community organizations across Canada for creating gardens, education, or other environmental initiatives.

School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

Assess Your School's Current Food Environment

The surveys below will help you assess and enhance your school food environment.

FOOD ENVIRONMENT SURVEY FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS



In the table below, consider each question and circle your response.



For any question where you did NOT circle "Yes," related resources are provided with space to create an action plan. You can also speak to your public health nurse for questions or recommendations to improve your school food environment, or contact the Healthy Schools Program at 519-258-2146, extension 1555 or email cs@wechu.org

SCHOOL EATING ENVIRONMENTS & FOOD ACCESS					
1	Our eating areas have comfortable spaces to eat lunch and snacks. Describe:	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
2	Our staff and students have enough time to eat at mealtimes.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
3	Our school provides a screen-free eating environment.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
4	Our staff eat with students to support connectedness and model positive eating practices.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
5	At nutrition breaks, our students are encouraged to follow their hunger cues by deciding how much to eat or whether to eat, and the order that they eat their foods from home.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
6	Our students are encouraged to drink water and have water bottles with them in class.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
7	Our school considers cultural needs related to food and drinks provided by the school. Describe:	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
8	Our school offers access to nutritious foods representative of <i>Canada's Food Guide</i> in various locations in the school. Check all that apply: <input type="radio"/> Cafeteria <input type="radio"/> Vending Machines <input type="radio"/> School Shop <input type="radio"/> Student Nutrition Program Snack Bins <input type="radio"/> Other	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure

School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

EATING ENVIRONMENTS & FOOD ACCESS

RELATED RESOURCES:

- [Creating a positive food environment in schools \(français\)](#)
- [Canada's Food Guide Toolkit for Educators \(français\)](#)
- [Mealtime Conversation Starters - An Activity for Educators and Families](#)

ACTION PLAN:

1. **What do we want to achieve and in what timeframe?** *(be specific but realistic)*

2. **How will we know we have achieved it?** *(e.g., change in behaviour, program in place)*

3. **Who is involved and what is their role?** *(school administrator, educator, students, etc.)*

SCHOOL PROMOTION ACTIVITIES & LANGUAGE

1	In our school, food is talked about in a neutral way (foods are called by their names and not labelled as good/bad, healthy/unhealthy, etc.)	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
2	Our lunch monitors receive training on food neutral language and their supervision role.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
3	Our school promotes the use of non-food rewards for good behaviours, academic achievements, sporting events or other activities and celebrations. Describe:	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
4	Our school sells non-food items to raise funds. Describe:	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
5	Our school promotes images of nutritious foods representative of <i>Canada's Food Guide</i> .	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
6	Our school promotes body diversity (i.e., different body types) in the images throughout the school.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure

School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

SCHOOL PROMOTION ACTIVITIES & LANGUAGE

RELATED RESOURCES:

- [Tips for Talking About Food in the Classroom and Lunchroom](#)
- [Rethink Celebrations \(français\)](#), [Rethink Rewards \(français\)](#), and [Fantastic Fundraising \(français\)](#)

ACTION PLAN:

1. **What do we want to achieve and in what timeframe?** (*be specific but realistic*)
2. **How will we know we have achieved it?** (*e.g., change in behaviour, program in place*)
3. **Who is involved and what is their role?** (*school administrator, educator, students, etc.*)

SCHOOL POLICIES, PROGRAMS & FUNDING

1	Our food and nutrition policy is visible in the school.	Yes	No	Unsure
2	Our food and nutrition policy is communicated to the school community. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
3	Our school is part of the ON Student Nutrition Program. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
4	Other than the Student Nutrition Program, our school receives additional nutritional supports from the community through grants and donations. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
5	Our school provides opportunities for students to explore food through preparing or cooking, growing and/or food waste composting. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
6	Our school has policies and/or strategies in place to address bullying related to food and body size. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure

School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

FOOD ENVIRONMENT SURVEY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

- 🍏 In the table below, consider each question and circle your response.
- 🍏 **For any question where you did NOT circle “Yes,” related resources are provided with space to create an action plan.** You can also speak to your public health nurse for questions or recommendations to enhance your school food environment. Contact the Healthy Schools Program at 519-258-2146, extension 1555 or email cs@wechu.org.

SCHOOL EATING ENVIRONMENT AND FOOD ACCESS				
1	Our school has clean and comfortable spaces for eating meals and snacks. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
2	Our school has enough tables and seating for students to eat their meals.	Yes	No	Unsure
3	Our designated eating areas are screen-free zones without television screens.	Yes	No	Unsure
4	Our school has enough trash and recycling bins.	Yes	No	Unsure
5	Our school offers access to nutritious foods representative of <i>Canada’s Food Guide</i> in various locations in the school. Check all that apply: <input type="radio"/> Cafeteria <input type="radio"/> Vending Machines <input type="radio"/> School Shop <input type="radio"/> Student Nutrition Program Snack Bins <input type="radio"/> Other	Yes	No	Unsure
6	Our school considers cultural needs related to food and drinks. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
7	Our students are involved in choosing the food and drinks made available at school.	Yes	No	Unsure
RELATED RESOURCES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a positive food environment in schools (français) • Canada’s Food Guide Toolkit for Educators (français) • Mealtime Conversation Starters - An Activity for Educators and Families 				

School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

EATING ENVIRONMENTS & FOOD ACCESS

ACTION PLAN:

1. **What do we want to achieve and in what timeframe?** *(be specific but realistic)*
2. **How will we know we have achieved it?** *(e.g., change in behaviour, program in place)*
3. **Who is involved and what is their role?** *(school administrator, educator, students, etc.)*

SCHOOL PROMOTION ACTIVITIES AND LANGUAGE

1	Our school promotes images of nutritious foods representative of <i>Canada's Food Guide</i> .	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
2	Our school promotes body diversity found in the images throughout the school.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
3	Our school staff use food-neutral language to support all to develop positive relationships with food and their bodies.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
4	Our school uses non-food reward for students.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure
5	Our school uses non-food items to raise funds.	Yes	No	Sometimes	Unsure

SCHOOL PROMOTION ACTIVITIES & LANGUAGE

RELATED RESOURCES:

- [Tips for Talking About Food in the Classroom and Lunchroom](#)
- [Rethink Celebrations \(français\)](#), [Rethink Rewards \(français\)](#), and [Fantastic Fundraising \(français\)](#)

ACTION PLAN:

1. **What do we want to achieve and in what timeframe?** *(be specific but realistic)*
2. **How will we know we have achieved it?** *(e.g., change in behaviour, program in place)*
3. **Who is involved and what is their role?** *(school administrator, educator, students, etc.)*

School Nutrition TOOLKIT

How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School

SCHOOL POLICIES, PROGRAMS & FUNDING				
1	Our food and nutrition policy is visible in the school.	Yes	No	Unsure
2	Our food and nutrition policy is communicated to the school community. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
3	Our school is part of the ON Student Nutrition Program. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
4	Other than the Student Nutrition Program, our school receives additional nutritional supports from the community through grants and donations. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
5	Our school provides opportunities for students to explore food through preparing or cooking, growing and/or food waste composting. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
6	Our school has policies and/or strategies in place to address bullying related to food and body size. Describe:	Yes	No	Unsure
SCHOOL POLICIES, PROGRAMS & FUNDING	<p>RELATED RESOURCES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Food and Beverage Policy (PPM150) (français) • You're the Chef - cooking program to offer at your school • Grants and Funding Opportunities - support for hands-on programs • Grow a School Garden or Classroom Garden (français) 			
	<p>ACTION PLAN:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do we want to achieve and in what timeframe? <i>(be specific but realistic)</i> 2. How will we know we have achieved it? <i>(e.g., change in behaviour, program in place)</i> 3. Who is involved and what is their role? <i>(school administrator, educator, students, etc.)</i> 			