

# Move Well Eat Well

## Social mealtimes



Feeding children and nurturing healthy eating is a shared job. Parents, schools and students each have a defined role in eating:

**Parents** decide what food is provided from home. If food is provided by the school, such as in the canteen, they choose what is offered on these occasions.

**Schools** decide when and where students eat.

**Students** decide how much, in what order and whether they eat.

This means that as a school you can take the focus off the *'what'* and *'how much'* students eat and focus on making mealtimes enjoyable. Creating a positive, relaxed and social mealtime can help children to build healthy eating behaviours. You can do this by:

- encouraging positive conversations
- role modelling your enjoyment of food and eating
- teaching appropriate mealtime behaviours.

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## Encouraging positive conversations

- Encourage students to be polite around food. Actively discourage negative or potentially hurtful comments about what any individual is eating.
- Use neutral language when talking about food. Call food by its name, rather than referring to it as healthy, unhealthy, good or bad.
- Help students to get curious about food. Try asking them to:
  - Use the five senses to describe food (how does it look, feel, taste or smell?)
  - Explore foods (how/where does it grow? What are other ways you can prepare it?)

### At mealtimes:

- Don't feel pressured to talk about food or eating, simply encourage pleasant conversation. This will help children to build social skills and can help make mealtimes a time to connect with each other.
- If you are going to talk about food, phrase questions positively. For example, try asking "what did you like about your meal today?" instead of "did you like it or not?".

## Role modelling your enjoyment of food and eating

- If you can, sit and eat with students. Showing children that you enjoy eating a variety of food and feel good about your eating can be more powerful than anything you say.
- If you can't sit with students to eat, role model in other ways. Try:
  - Actively sharing your positive food experiences. For example, you might like to talk about a tasty meal you cooked on the weekend or about visiting the farmers market to buy vegetables. This normalises enjoying a range of foods in different ways.
  - Participating in the fruit and vegetable break.
  - Drinking water in class and at mealtimes. This will reinforce that water is the drink of choice.

## Teaching appropriate mealtime behaviours

- Manners, social etiquette and personal hygiene are all important skills that children need to become healthy eaters.