

THE *Food Friendly* SCHOOL FRAMEWORK

**Supporting Australian Schools to Nurture
Healthy Student Food Relationships**



About the Author

Alyssa Said is a PDHPE teacher, mother, certified Food Relationship Counsellor/Body Image Coach, and founder of Redwood Wellbeing.

Her own journey of recovering from an eating disorder, together with her experience supporting young people and families, has shaped her belief that children deserve nutrition education that builds knowledge without compromising their relationship with food.

She created Redwood Wellbeing to help parents, educators and communities raise children who trust their bodies, enjoy eating and develop lifelong wellbeing free from food guilt and negative body image.



About Redwood Wellbeing

Redwood Wellbeing exists to help raise a generation of children who experience food and their bodies with trust, confidence and peace.

We support parents, educators and schools through practical, evidence-informed resources that promote positive food relationships, body acceptance and responsive approaches to feeding and nutrition education.

Like the redwood trees that inspired our name, we believe children thrive when they are surrounded by strong, supportive relationships. By working together, families, schools and communities can create environments that nurture lifelong health and wellbeing.

**Helping raise a generation of children who trust their bodies,
enjoy food, and experience lifelong wellbeing.**

OUR VISION

We envision a future where every Australian child leaves school with nutrition knowledge that supports their relationship with food.

Schools play an important role in shaping children's understanding of food. Every lesson, lunchtime, classroom celebration and everyday conversation contributes to the messages children receive about eating.

The Food-Friendly School Framework

recognises that schools have the opportunity to teach nutrition while also protecting children's confidence and trust in their own bodies.

OUR VISION IS FOR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS WHERE CHILDREN:

Learn about nutrition without fear or shame

Experience food without labels of "good" or "bad"

Feel safe to bring foods from their family and culture

Develop confidence in making food choices

Understand that health includes both physical and emotional wellbeing

Know peaceful eating without self judgement

Because every child deserves to leave school with a healthier relationship with food than when they started

WHY THIS FRAMEWORK MATTERS

Schools are one of the most influential environments in a child's life, shaping not only what children know about food but also how they think and feel about eating, their bodies, and their ability to make food choices.

Through lessons, lunch breaks, policies, celebrations, canteens and everyday conversations, schools help shape children's lifelong relationship with food.

NUTRITION EDUCATION MATTERS - AND SO DOES THE WAY WE TEACH IT

Nutrition education provides children with valuable knowledge about how food supports their growing bodies and helps develop important life skills. Equally important is how food is discussed. The language adults use and the experiences schools create influence children's beliefs about eating. Approaching food with curiosity, respect and balance helps children build confidence, flexibility and trust, while judgement or restriction can contribute to guilt, shame or rigid thinking.

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS IN A CHANGING FOOD LANDSCAPE

Schools are expected to support children's health while navigating diverse family values, cultural practices, community expectations and individual student needs. The Food-Friendly School Framework supports educators by providing a shared language and evidence-informed guidance to help create positive food environments. It builds on the important work schools already do and aims to increase confidence when navigating food-related conversations and practices.

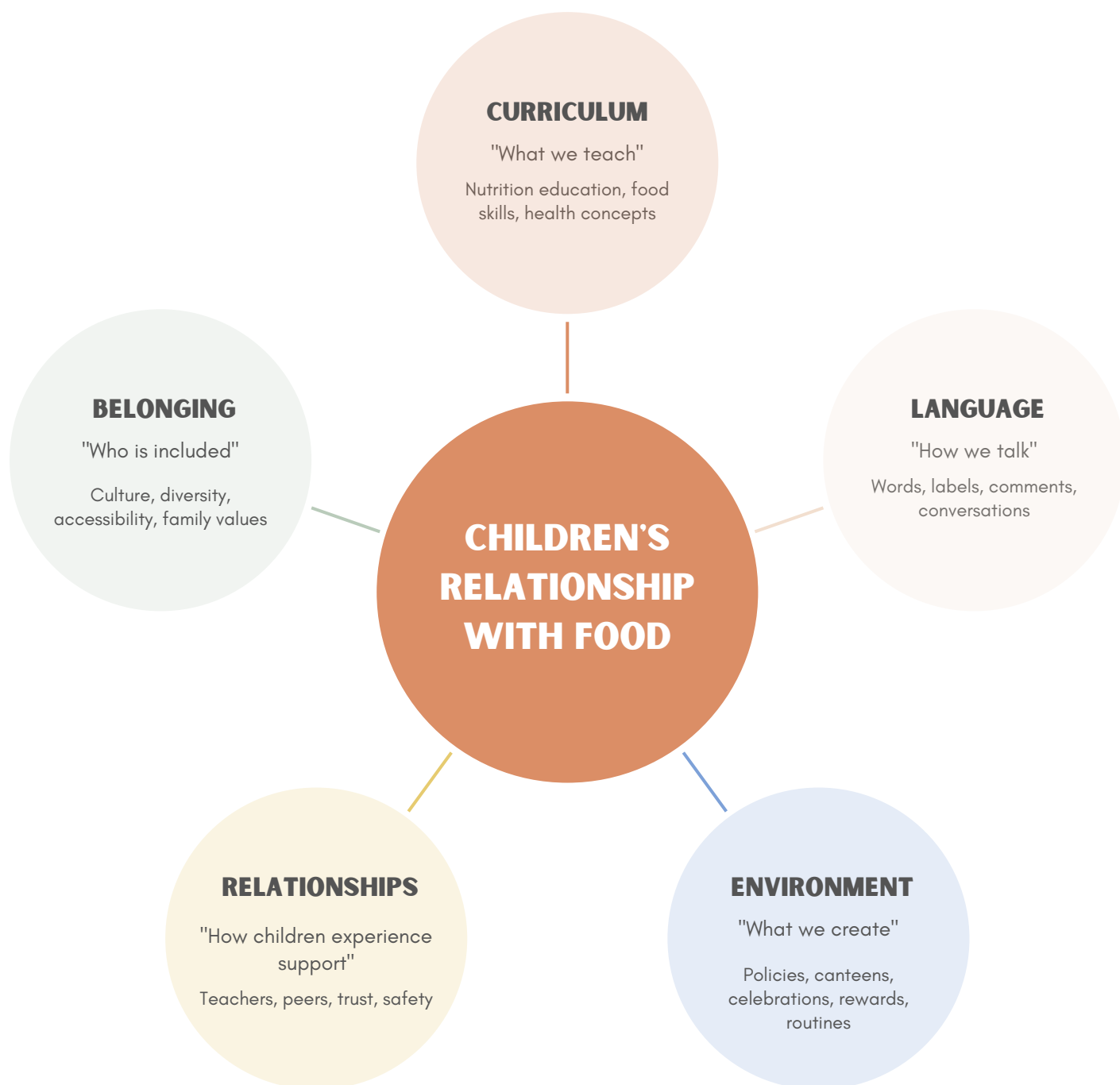
WELL-INTENTIONED MESSAGES CAN HAVE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Many school food practices are designed to promote children's health, including teaching nutrition, encouraging nutritious foods and developing practical food skills. However, the way these messages are communicated matters. Practices such as labelling foods as "good" or "bad", commenting on lunchboxes, using food as a reward or encouraging children to eat certain foods before others can unintentionally create judgement around food and influence how children view eating and themselves.

A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR SCHOOLS

The Food-Friendly School Framework recognises that supporting children's health and fostering a positive relationship with food go hand in hand. Schools can provide accurate nutrition education while creating environments where children feel safe, respected and confident around food. This framework offers practical, evidence-informed guidance to support children's physical health, emotional wellbeing and lifelong relationship with eating.

"WHAT ARE CHILDREN LEARNING ABOUT FOOD THROUGH THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH US?"



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Food-Friendly School Framework is built upon a shared belief that schools have an important role in supporting children's health and wellbeing. Food education is not only about what children eat today. It is also about helping children develop the knowledge, confidence and trust they need to have a positive relationship with food throughout their lives. The following principles guide the recommendations within this framework.

1 WE BELIEVE EVERY CHILD DESERVES A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

A positive relationship with food is an important part of lifelong wellbeing. Schools have an opportunity to help children experience food with confidence, curiosity and enjoyment while developing the knowledge and skills to support their health.

The goal of food education is not simply to influence children's choices in the moment, but to nurture a relationship with food that supports their wellbeing across their lifetime.

2 WE BELIEVE NUTRITION CAN BE TAUGHT WITHOUT FOOD MORALITY

Children benefit from learning about nutrition, health and the role food plays in supporting their bodies.

However, nutrition education does not require foods to be labelled as "good" or "bad", nor should food choices be connected to a child's character, behaviour or worth.

Schools can promote nutritious eating patterns while using language that is respectful, balanced and free from guilt, shame and judgement.

3 WE BELIEVE HEALTHY EATING AND A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD ARE NOT COMPETING GOALS

Supporting children's physical health and protecting their relationship with food are complementary goals.

Schools can provide meaningful nutrition education while also encouraging trust, flexibility, enjoyment and confidence around eating.

A food environment that supports wellbeing considers not only what children eat, but also how they feel about food.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

4 WE BELIEVE CHILDREN'S WELLBEING EXTENDS BEYOND WHAT THEY EAT

Health is influenced by physical, emotional and social wellbeing.

Children's experiences with food, eating and their bodies can contribute to how they understand health and themselves. School environments should support children's overall wellbeing by creating experiences that are safe, respectful and inclusive.

5 WE BELIEVE CHILDREN DESERVE DIGNITY, AUTONOMY AND RESPECT AROUND FOOD

Children are developing lifelong eating skills. Adults play an important role in providing guidance, structure and opportunities to learn, while children benefit from developing trust in their own internal cues and experiences.

School practices should support children to build confidence around eating without unnecessary pressure, judgement or comparison.

6 WE BELIEVE FAMILIES ARE VALUED PARTNERS IN CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

Families bring diverse cultures, traditions, values, experiences and circumstances to the school community.

Schools strengthen children's wellbeing by working collaboratively with families and recognising that there are many ways to nourish children and support healthy eating.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

7 WE BELIEVE THE LANGUAGE ADULTS USE AROUND FOOD MATTERS

Children learn about food not only through formal lessons, but through everyday conversations, classroom experiences, lunch supervision, celebrations and the behaviours modelled by trusted adults.

The words we choose can help children develop curiosity, confidence and trust, or they can unintentionally contribute to food judgement, guilt and shame.

Thoughtful, respectful language is an important part of creating food-friendly environments.

8 WE BELIEVE EVERY CHILD DESERVES AN INCLUSIVE FOOD ENVIRONMENT

Food-related experiences at school should allow every child to feel safe, respected and included. This includes recognising and supporting diverse cultures, family circumstances, food allergies, medical needs, disability, neurodivergence, sensory differences and individual experiences with food.

Every child deserves to feel that they belong.

Our shared commitment

The Food-Friendly School Framework is guided by one central question:

Will this help children leave school with a stronger, more positive relationship with food than when they started?

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Research consistently shows that children's experiences with food, the language used by trusted adults, and the environments in which they learn all contribute to the beliefs they develop about food and eating.

Schools are one part of this broader picture. Alongside families and the wider community, they have an important opportunity to support children's lifelong health by creating food environments that are respectful, inclusive and free from unnecessary judgement.

The following evidence statements summarise the research that underpins this framework.

SCHOOLS HELP SHAPE CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOOD

Children learn about food not only through nutrition lessons, but also through everyday experiences such as lunch supervision, classroom conversations, celebrations, school policies and the behaviours modelled by trusted adults.

Research supports a whole-school approach to health promotion, recognising that children learn through both formal education and the wider school environment. This means that every interaction involving food has the potential to reinforce messages about health, eating and wellbeing.

The Australian Government's Good Practice Guide: Supporting Healthy Eating and Drinking at School states that schools play an important role in teaching children the knowledge and skills that support lifelong healthy eating, and that this learning is strengthened when it occurs within a whole-school approach that includes leadership, policies, teaching, staff and families. Importantly, the guide defines food literacy as "the tools needed for a healthy lifelong relationship with food."

What this means for schools

Creating a positive food environment extends beyond teaching nutrition. Schools can support children's lifelong relationship with food by considering the messages communicated through:

- nutrition education
- teacher language
- lunch supervision
- school policies
- classroom rewards
- celebrations and fundraising
- canteen practices
- interactions between adults and students.

Key Takeaway

Children don't just learn about food at school -they learn how to FEEL about food.

NUTRITION CAN BE TAUGHT WITHOUT FOOD MORALITY

Children benefit from learning about nutrition, health and the role food plays in supporting their growing bodies.

However, nutrition education is most supportive when it provides children with knowledge and skills without creating judgement or fear around food.

Food has nutritional value, but it does not have moral value.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines describe foods and dietary patterns. They do not recommend assigning moral value to foods or using shame-based language in nutrition education.

Different foods provide different nutrients, and some foods may be more appropriate in certain situations than others. However, describing foods as "good", "bad", "healthy", "unhealthy" or "naughty" can unintentionally create the belief that some foods –and the people who eat them – are better or worse than others.

Children do not need to fear certain foods in order to understand nutrition. When food is placed into categories of "good" and "bad", children may begin to attach emotions and identity to eating. Over time, this can contribute to guilt, shame and rigid beliefs about food.

A food-friendly approach recognises that nutrition education and positive food relationships can exist together. Schools can teach children about nutrients, balance, variety and how food supports the body while also encouraging flexibility, curiosity and confidence around eating.

Current Australian guidance supports teaching children about nutrition while using language that is respectful, inclusive and free from judgement. [The Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) encourage enjoyment of a wide variety of nutritious foods and provide evidence-based recommendations about dietary patterns for health.

The National Eating Disorders Collaboration's Eating Disorder Safe Principles, endorsed by the Australian Government, recommend using neutral language when talking about food and avoiding labels such as "good" and "bad", recognising that food messaging can influence people's relationships with eating.

What this means for schools

Schools can support positive food relationships by:

- teaching about nutrients and the role food plays in the body rather than ranking foods as good or bad
- using neutral, descriptive language when discussing food
- avoiding messages that suggest a child's food choices reflect their health, character or effort
- recognising that all foods can have a place within a varied eating pattern
- encouraging curiosity and learning rather than fear or restriction

Key Takeaway

Children can learn about nutrition without learning to fear, judge or moralise food.

SUPPORTING AUTONOMY HELPS CHILDREN DEVELOP CONFIDENCE AROUND FOOD

Children are born with the ability to recognise feelings of hunger, fullness and satisfaction. These internal cues help them regulate how much they eat and continue to develop through repeated opportunities to practise eating in supportive, low-pressure environments.

Research consistently shows that when adults use pressure or control to influence children's eating, it can interfere with children's ability to respond to these internal cues. Practices such as encouraging children to take "just one more bite", insisting they eat foods in a particular order, requiring them to finish parts of their lunch before eating others, or commenting on how much they have eaten are often well intentioned. However, these strategies do not consistently improve children's long-term eating behaviours and may reduce children's confidence in responding to their own hunger and fullness.

This understanding is reflected in the work of Ellyn Satter, whose [Division of Responsibility](#) in Feeding describes complementary roles for adults and children at mealtimes. Adults are responsible for deciding what, when and where food is offered, while children are trusted to decide whether to eat and how much to eat from the food provided. This responsive approach aims to support children's developing self-regulation and confidence around eating over time.

If you'd like to learn more about the Division of Responsibility, the [Ellyn Satter Institute's explanation](#) provides an excellent overview.

Australian guidance aligns with these principles. The National Eating Disorders Collaboration's Eating Disorder Safe Principles, funded by the Australian Government, encourage adults to create food environments that are free from pressure, judgement and unnecessary control. The principles emphasise that respectful, responsive interactions around food help foster positive relationships with eating and reduce the risk of unintentionally reinforcing food guilt, shame or anxiety.

You can read the full guidance in the [National Eating Disorders Collaboration's Eating Disorder Safe Principles](#).

For schools, this means that supporting healthy eating is not about encouraging children to eat more or less of particular foods during the school day. Instead, it is about creating a calm, respectful environment where children can eat without pressure, develop trust in their bodies and experience food as a normal and enjoyable part of everyday life.

What this means for schools

Schools can support children's developing self-regulation by:

- allowing children to decide the order in which they eat the foods in their lunchbox
- avoiding pressure to finish foods or eat "just one more bite"
- recognising that appetite naturally varies from day to day
- avoiding comments about how much or how little a child has eaten
- trusting that families are best placed to manage eating outside of school
- focusing on creating a positive eating environment rather than monitoring intake

Key Takeaway

Children develop confidence around food when adults provide guidance without pressure and trust them to learn about their own bodies over time.

FOOD REWARDS AND RESTRICTIVE PRACTICES CAN HAVE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Schools often use food in ways that are intended to support children's wellbeing. Food may be offered as a reward for positive behaviour, used to celebrate achievements, or restricted in an effort to encourage healthier eating. These practices are usually introduced with positive intentions—to motivate children, reinforce learning or promote healthy choices.

However, research suggests that the way food is used can influence children's developing relationship with eating in ways adults may not intend.

Research by developmental psychologist Leann Birch and colleagues has demonstrated that using food as a reward can influence children's food preferences and motivation. Their research found that when children receive one food as a reward for eating another food, the reward food can become more desirable, while the food they were encouraged to eat may become associated with pressure or obligation rather than enjoyment. This research suggests that rewarding children with highly preferred foods, such as lollies or treats, for eating other foods may unintentionally communicate that the reward food is more valuable, special or desirable.

Further information about Birch's research into children's food preferences and eating behaviours can be explored through:

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1129474>

Research also shows that restricting children's access to certain foods can increase their interest in those foods. When foods are presented as forbidden, highly controlled or associated with rules, children may become more focused on them. While some restrictions are necessary for safety, allergies, medical needs or individual circumstances, restrictions based on judgement or fear of certain foods may unintentionally contribute to rigid thinking around eating.

These findings align with responsive feeding approaches, including the work of Ellyn Satter and the Division of Responsibility in Feeding

This evidence suggests that schools can promote children's health without using food as a reward, punishment or behaviour-management tool.

This does not mean that food should be removed from school celebrations, cultural experiences or community events. Food plays an important role in connection, belonging and shared experiences. The distinction is that food can be part of a celebration without becoming something children must earn.

What this means for schools

Schools can support positive food relationships by:

- recognising effort, kindness and achievement without using food as a reward
- avoiding classroom practices that require children to earn food treats
- ensuring food restrictions are based on safety or medical needs rather than moral judgements about food
- creating celebrations where food is one enjoyable part of the experience rather than the reward itself
- supporting children to view all foods as foods, without assigning greater value to some than others

Key Takeaway

Keeping food separate from rewards, punishment and behaviour helps children develop a more balanced and trusting relationship with eating.

CHILDREN BENEFIT FROM CONSISTENT FOOD MESSAGES

Children develop their understanding of food through repeated experiences and messages from the people and environments around them. Schools are not just places where children learn about nutrition through formal lessons – they are environments where children observe, experience and interpret messages about food every day.

When messages about food are consistent, children are more likely to develop clear and balanced understandings of eating. However, when children receive conflicting messages; for example, being taught that some foods are "bad" while those same foods are sold at the school canteen, used for fundraising, or offered as classroom rewards – it can create confusion about what food messages they should trust.

Research into children's learning and development highlights that children learn through observation, modelling and the social environments around them. Social learning theory, developed by psychologist Albert Bandura, demonstrated that children learn not only through direct instruction but also by observing the behaviours, attitudes and choices of influential adults. This means that the food culture children experience at school can be just as influential as the nutrition information they are explicitly taught.

Learn more about social learning theory:

[Social Learning Theory – Simply Psychology overview](https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html?utm_source=Social_Learning_Theory_-_Simply_Psychology_overview)

[https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html?utm_source](https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html?utm_source=Social_Learning_Theory_-_Simply_Psychology_overview)

Australian guidance also recognises that creating supportive food environments requires consistency across the settings where children live, learn and grow. The National Eating Disorders Collaboration's Eating Disorder Safe Principles, developed with support from the Australian Government, highlight that the way adults communicate about food, health and bodies can influence children's beliefs and experiences. The principles encourage environments where food is discussed in neutral, respectful ways and where messages do not create unnecessary fear, guilt or shame around eating.

Learn more:

National Eating Disorders Collaboration – Eating Disorder Safe Principles

<https://nedc.com.au/eating-disorders/eating-disorders-explained/risk-and-protective-factors>

The goal is not to remove enjoyable foods from schools. Rather, it is to create consistency by ensuring that all parts of school life communicate the same message:

Food can be enjoyed without judgement, and learning about nutrition does not require fear or shame.

What this means for schools

Schools can create consistent food messages by:

- ensuring classroom nutrition lessons align with school food practices
- reviewing whether rewards, celebrations and fundraising reflect the school's wellbeing values
- using consistent, neutral language across classrooms, canteens and communications
- supporting staff to understand the impact of everyday food conversations
- creating policies that focus on inclusion, wellbeing and positive relationships with food

Key Takeaway

When schools create consistent, respectful messages about food, children are better supported to develop confidence and trust in their own relationship with eating.

BODY IMAGE BEGINS IN CHILDHOOD

The National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC) also identifies body dissatisfaction as an important risk factor associated with eating disorders and highlights the role that supportive environments can play in promoting positive body image and reducing harmful attitudes towards bodies.

National Eating Disorders Collaboration – Prevention and Early Intervention Resources
<https://nedc.com.au/eating-disorder-resources/educational-professionals>

Schools have an important opportunity to support children by creating environments where bodies are respected, diversity is recognised and health is not reduced to appearance.

This includes being mindful of the connection between food messages and body image. When children repeatedly hear messages that certain foods must be controlled in order to achieve a particular body, or that health can be judged by appearance, they may begin to associate food choices with self-worth.

A food-friendly school environment recognises that children do not need to fear food or their bodies in order to learn about health.

Nutrition education can focus on:

- how food supports the body
- enjoyment and connection
- variety and flexibility
- caring for ourselves

without focusing on:

- weight
- appearance
- body comparison
- achieving a particular body size or shape

This approach aligns with the Australian Government's Australian Dietary Guidelines, which focus on nourishing dietary patterns and wellbeing rather than weight-based judgement.
https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/australian-dietary-guidelines-1-5?utm_

What this means for schools

Schools can support positive body image by:

- avoiding comments about children's bodies, weight or appearance
- avoiding linking food choices with body size or worth
- teaching that bodies naturally come in different shapes, sizes and abilities
- focusing on what bodies can do rather than how bodies look
- ensuring health education promotes wellbeing rather than fear or comparison
- using inclusive language that respects all children and families

Key Takeaway

Children deserve to grow up knowing that their worth is not determined by their body, their appearance or the foods they eat. Schools can help protect body image by creating environments where all bodies are respected.

FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS ARE PARTNERS IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOOD

Families are children's first and most influential teachers. They bring with them their own cultural traditions, values, experiences, financial circumstances, food access, medical considerations and approaches to eating. A food-friendly school environment recognises and respects this diversity rather than assuming there is one "right" way for every family to approach food.

Research into child development consistently highlights the importance of strong relationships between families and schools. When educators and families work collaboratively, children benefit from consistent support, trust and communication across the environments where they live and learn.

The Australian Curriculum – General Capabilities and Health and Physical Education curriculum recognises the importance of students developing knowledge, skills and understanding that support health and wellbeing. This learning is strengthened when schools, families and communities work together to support children's development. However, collaboration does not mean schools taking responsibility for monitoring or controlling children's eating. A food-friendly approach recognises that educators do not know every detail of a child's home environment, and children should not be placed in the position of explaining or defending their family's food choices.

For example, a child's lunchbox may reflect many factors that are outside the child's control, including:

- family food preferences and culture
- allergies or dietary requirements
- food availability
- financial circumstances
- time constraints
- sensory preferences
- family circumstances

The National Eating Disorders Collaboration's Eating Disorder Safe Principles, supported by the Australian Government, emphasise the importance of creating inclusive environments that respect individual differences and avoid judgement or assumptions about food choices and eating behaviours.

Similarly, responsive feeding approaches such as the work of Ellyn Satter recognise that feeding children is a shared responsibility. Adults provide support, structure and opportunities to eat, while children develop trust in their own internal cues over time.

Ellyn Satter Institute – Division of Responsibility in Feeding

For schools, this means that concerns about a child's eating should be approached with curiosity, compassion and collaboration – not judgement.

If educators have concerns about a child's access to food, nutrition or wellbeing, these conversations should occur respectfully with parents or carers rather than through comments directed at the child.

A child is never responsible for:

- what food is available at home
- what is packed in their lunchbox
- family finances
- cultural food practices
- dietary restrictions
- adult decisions about food

What this means for schools

Schools can strengthen partnerships with families by:

- respecting that families have different food cultures, values and circumstances
- avoiding judgement or assumptions based on a child's lunchbox
- communicating concerns privately with parents or carers rather than commenting to children
- recognising that food choices are influenced by many factors beyond a child's control
- including diverse cultural foods and experiences within the school environment
- working collaboratively with families to support children's wellbeing

Key Takeaway

Children deserve to have their families respected. Schools and families are strongest when they work together to support children, without judgement or assumptions about food.

The evidence tells us why children's relationships with food matter. This next section focuses on how schools can put these principles into everyday practice. The recommendations that follow are designed to support educators in creating food environments that are consistent, respectful and developmentally appropriate.

TEACHING AND TALKING ABOUT FOOD

Creating a food-friendly learning environment

Schools play an important role in helping children develop food knowledge, confidence and lifelong health literacy. Nutrition education provides children with opportunities to learn about food groups, nutrients, food preparation and the ways food supports growth, learning and wellbeing.

A food-friendly approach recognises that nutrition education and positive relationships with food are not competing goals – they work best together.

Children do not need to fear food, feel guilty about eating, or view foods as "good" or "bad" in order to develop strong nutrition knowledge. By teaching nutrition with curiosity, respect and evidence-based language, schools can support both children's health and their relationship with food.

Every interaction with food communicates a message. The words educators use, the examples they provide, and the way food is included within classroom experiences all contribute to how children learn to think and feel about eating.

Curriculum Connection

The Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education encourages students to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing throughout life.

Within the curriculum, students learn about:

- the role of food in supporting health and wellbeing
- nutrition and food choices
- factors that influence health behaviours
- practical food skills and food preparation
- respectful understanding of diversity and different experiences.

A food-friendly approach supports schools to meet these curriculum goals while recognising that nutrition education does not require fear, shame or judgement. The Australian Curriculum does not require schools to label foods as "good" or "bad", monitor children's food choices, or create anxiety around particular foods. Instead, schools can teach nutrition in ways that build knowledge, confidence, curiosity and lifelong wellbeing.

FOOD FRIENDLY PRACTISES

Teach nutrition without food morality

Children benefit from learning factual information about nutrition without assigning moral value to foods. Rather than describing foods as "good", "bad", "healthy", "unhealthy" or "junk", educators can describe what foods provide and how they contribute to health.

For example:

- **"Calcium helps build strong bones and teeth."**
- **"Carbohydrates provide energy for our brains and muscles."**
- **"Fruit contains vitamins and fibre."**
- **"Different foods provide our bodies with different nutrients."**

Children can develop nutrition knowledge without learning that their food choices determine whether they are making a "good" or "bad" decision.

Use language that informs rather than judges

Children learn about food through the words and attitudes of the adults around them. The language used in classrooms can either support curiosity and confidence or unintentionally create fear, guilt and shame.

Educators can support positive food relationships by:

- referring to foods by their names
- describing foods by their characteristics or nutrients
- avoiding labels that create food hierarchies
- avoiding language that links food choices with being "good" or "bad".

Encourage curiosity and critical thinking

Food education is most effective when children are encouraged to explore, question and think critically.

Classroom conversations can include:

- where foods come from
- how foods are grown and prepared
- the nutrients different foods provide
- the role food plays in different cultures
- the many reasons people eat, including nourishment, enjoyment and connection.

Curiosity allows children to build knowledge without relying on fear or restrictive rules.

Teach health without focusing on weight or appearance

Health education should support children's wellbeing without reinforcing the idea that health is determined by body size or appearance. Focus conversations on: nourishment, energy, growth and development, strength, enjoyment, wellbeing.

Avoid linking foods with changing body shape or size, and avoid discussions about dieting, weight loss or appearance in front of students. Children benefit from learning that bodies are diverse and worthy of respect.

Separate food from rewards and achievement

Food is often used in schools to celebrate achievements, encourage behaviour or recognise effort. These practices are usually introduced with positive intentions and are often part of long-standing school traditions.

However, when food is consistently used as a reward, children may begin to associate certain foods with achievement, success or being "good." Over time, this can unintentionally create messages that some foods are more valuable, special or deserving than others. Children benefit from learning that food is not something they need to earn, deserve or receive as a measure of their worth.

This does not mean food cannot be part of celebrations or shared experiences. Food plays an important role in connection, culture and enjoyment. Rather, schools can consider whether food is being used as a tool for behaviour management or as a symbol of achievement.

Schools can recognise children's effort, kindness, learning and achievements through meaningful forms of acknowledgement that do not rely on food.

Examples include:

- **specific verbal praise**
- **recognising effort and persistence**
- **leadership opportunities**
- **classroom responsibilities**
- **extra choice or privileges**
- **opportunities to share skills and strengths.**

Helpful Language

These suggested alternatives can help schools communicate about food in ways that are accurate, respectful and supportive of positive relationships with food.

INSTEAD OF	TRY THIS
"This is junk food"	"These are chips, chocolate or lollies."
"Sugar is bad for you."	"Different foods provide our bodies with different nutrients and energy."
"That's a healthy food."	"This food contains nutrients that support our bodies."
"You deserve a lolly because you worked hard."	"I noticed how much effort you put into your work."
"The class earned a treat because everyone behaved."	The class earned a special activity to celebrate your achievement."
"We need to burn off our treats."	"Movement helps our bodies feel strong and capable."
"This food is only a sometimes food."	"It's nice to eat yummy foods because they taste good, as well as foods that help our body grow."

Children do not need to fear food to learn about nutrition. When schools teach with curiosity, respect and evidence-based language, students can develop both nutrition knowledge and the foundations for a positive relationship with food.

CONDENSED SUMMARY: PAGES 23–27

Food-Friendly School Framework

This summary captures the key ideas from pages 23–27 to support schools in teaching about food in ways that are respectful, inclusive and evidence-based.



1. THE SHIFT: FROM EVIDENCE TO PRACTICE

Research shows that weight- and appearance-focused messages can cause harm and do not improve health.

- Schools have a responsibility to create safe, inclusive environments that support all students.

- Put evidence into action by using food education that promotes health, wellbeing and respect for everyone.

Key Takeaway



Evidence-informed practice means choosing approaches that support all students's health and learning.



2. AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION CONNECTION

- The Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum supports students to develop knowledge, skills and values for a healthy and fulfilling life.

- Contain descriptions and achievement standards can be taught through a food-friendly lens.

- Focus on building food knowledge, critical thinking, practical skills, and positive attitudes to support lifelong health and wellbeing.

In Practice



Use food education to build skills and confidence—not to change students's bodies or control what they eat.



3. TEACHING ABOUT FOOD: RESPECTFUL, EVIDENCE-BASED LANGUAGE

- Use language that is inclusive, respectful and focused on health, wellbeing and function.

- Teach that all foods can fit—there are no “good” or “bad” foods.

- Support students to listen to their bodies and make choices that feel right for them.

Remember



Our words shape how students feel about themselves, their bodies and food.



4. AVOID WEIGHT- OR APPEARANCE-BASED HEALTH MESSAGES

- Weight stigma and appearance-focused messages can harm students's self-esteem.

- Focus on what foods can do, how food supports us, and the social and cultural connections of food.

- Emphasise behaviour and habits, not body size or shape.

Focus On



Health is about more than weight. It includes physical, mental, social and cultural wellbeing.

5. HELPFUL LANGUAGE ALTERNATIVES

❌ Avoid (Judgement/Weight-Focused)

Good foods / ~~Bad foods~~

You shouldn't ~~eat that~~

~~Cheat meal~~ / ~~Cheat day~~

~~Earn your food~~

I ~~need to be good today~~

~~That will make you fat~~

~~Healthy~~ / ~~Unhealthy~~

~~You need to lose weight~~

✅ Use Instead (Neutral/Supportive)

→ Everyday foods / Sometimes foods

→ You get to choose what works for you

→ Enjoying foods you love

→ Food is not a reward or punishment

→ I will take care of myself today

→ Food gives your body energy and nutrients

→ More often / Sometimes

→ Let's focus on feeling strong and well

Our goal: Create food-friendly learning environments where all students feel safe, respected and supported to develop a positive relationship with food and their bodies.

SUPPORTING POSITIVE FOOD EXPERIENCES DURING EATING TIMES

Creating a safe and respectful eating environment

Eating times are an important part of the school day. Alongside providing nourishment, they offer children opportunities to develop confidence, autonomy and positive experiences with food.

Educators play an important role in creating environments where children feel safe to eat without judgement, pressure or comparison. While schools have responsibilities around supervision, safety and inclusion, eating times are not intended to be opportunities to monitor or control children's food choices.

A food-friendly approach supports children to enjoy their meals while recognising that families decide what food is provided, and children are learning to listen to their own hunger, fullness and preferences over time.

Wellbeing Connection

The Australian Curriculum recognises that students' health and wellbeing are influenced by the environments in which they learn and interact. Safe, respectful and inclusive school environments support children's physical, social and emotional development.

The curriculum does not require schools to monitor what children eat, direct the order in which foods are eaten, or comment on the contents of students' lunchboxes. The recommendations in this chapter support schools to create positive eating environments that promote wellbeing while respecting children's autonomy and family circumstances.

FOOD FRIENDLY PRACTISES

Respect children's autonomy around eating

Allow children, where possible, to decide the order in which they eat the foods in their lunchbox and how much they choose to eat from the food available.

Avoid requiring children to eat particular foods first or to finish certain foods before eating others.

Children are developing the ability to recognise their own hunger, fullness and satisfaction cues, and school eating times provide opportunities to support these lifelong skills.

Avoid commenting on lunchboxes

Children are not responsible for what is packed in their lunchbox. Avoid praising, criticising or comparing the foods children bring to school. Even well-intentioned comments can unintentionally communicate that some foods, or some families – are better than others.

If there is a genuine concern about a child's nutrition, wellbeing or access to food, this should be discussed privately with parents or carers rather than with the child.

Avoid pressure to eat

Children's appetites vary from day to day.

Avoid encouraging children to:

- eat more
- eat less
- Bring in 'healthier' foods the next day
- finish everything
- take "one more bite"
- eat foods in a particular order

Instead, provide adequate time for eating and allow children to decide how much they eat from the food available to them.

FOOD FRIENDLY PRACTISES

Keep conversations about food neutral

Eating times should be relaxed and enjoyable.

Avoid making food the focus of conversation by commenting on what children are eating or comparing lunchboxes.

Instead, encourage conversations that build relationships and connection, such as talking about learning, interests, friendships or activities.

Respect diversity in eating

Children eat differently for many reasons. Food choices and eating behaviours may be influenced by:

- culture and family traditions
- allergies or medical conditions
- sensory preferences
- neurodivergence
- food availability
- appetite

Avoid making assumptions or drawing attention to differences in what or how children eat.

Support safety while maintaining dignity

Schools have important responsibilities to manage allergies, food safety and individual health needs.

These responsibilities can be carried out while maintaining children's dignity and avoiding unnecessary attention, shame or exclusion around food.

Helpful Language

These suggested alternatives can help schools communicate about food in ways that are accurate, respectful and supportive of positive relationships with food.

INSTEAD OF	TRY THIS
Eat your healthy food first."	"Enjoy your lunch in the order that feels right for you."
"You need to finish your sandwich before your biscuit."	"I hope you enjoy your lunch."
"That's a healthy lunch!"	"I hope you've got something you enjoy today."
"You haven't eaten much."	"Lunch time is nearly over, so make sure you've had the chance to eat what you'd like."
"Why don't you have any fruit today?"	(No comment to the child.)
"You've only eaten your chips."	(No comment to the child.)
"It must be so hard with a peanut allergy"	No comment to the child.

Eating times should be safe, respectful and free from judgement. By avoiding pressure, comparison and unnecessary comments about food, schools can help children develop confidence, autonomy and positive relationships with eating.

CREATING FOOD-FRIENDLY SCHOOL POLICIES

Building a whole-school approach to children's relationships with food

Schools influence children's experiences with food through more than classroom lessons and eating times. Policies, procedures and everyday school practices all contribute to the messages children receive about food, health and wellbeing.

A food-friendly school recognises that supporting children's health involves more than encouraging certain foods. It also involves creating an environment where children feel safe, included and respected around food.

School policies provide an opportunity to ensure that the messages children receive across classrooms, the playground, the canteen and school events are consistent with the goal of supporting positive lifelong relationships with food.

Policy Connection

Schools have a responsibility to support student wellbeing, inclusion and health education.

The Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education recognises that health and wellbeing are influenced by personal, social, cultural and environmental factors. Schools contribute to students' wellbeing by creating environments that support safe participation, respectful relationships and informed decision-making.

Food-related policies can support these aims by:

- promoting nutrition education without shame or fear
- respecting diverse family and cultural experiences with food
- supporting inclusion and accessibility
- ensuring children experience consistent and respectful messages about health.

A food-friendly policy approach focuses on creating supportive environments rather than controlling individual children's food choices.

FOOD FRIENDLY PRACTISES

Create policies that support, rather than police, food choices

Food policies are most effective when they focus on the school environment rather than trying to control what individual children eat. Policies can support students by considering:

- how food is discussed across the school
- how nutrition education is delivered
- how celebrations are approached
- how the canteen reflects school values
- how families are communicated with
- how children with different needs are supported.

Policies should avoid practices that place responsibility for food choices onto children.

Use respectful and inclusive food language

The language used in school policies communicates important messages about food. Policies should avoid describing foods as:

- good or bad
- clean or unhealthy
- naughty or guilty foods
- rewards or treats for behaviour.

Instead, schools can use neutral, respectful language that acknowledges that foods provide different nutrients and serve different purposes. Food policies should communicate that:

- nutrition matters
- enjoyment matters
- culture matters
- access and circumstances matter
- all children deserve dignity around food.

Review lunchbox expectations

Lunchbox policies are often created with the intention of supporting children's health. However, schools should consider whether expectations unintentionally create shame, judgement or pressure for children and families.

When reviewing lunchbox approaches, schools can consider:

- Are we asking children to be responsible for decisions made by adults?
- Does this policy respect different family circumstances?
- Does it consider cultural diversity?
- Could a child feel embarrassed or singled out because of their lunchbox?
- Are concerns about food being discussed privately with families rather than children?

Children are not responsible for:

- purchasing food
- family finances
- food availability
- dietary requirements
- cultural food choices.

Ensure food messages are consistent across the school

Children learn from the entire school environment. Schools can consider whether their messages about food are consistent across:

- classroom learning
- lunch supervision
- the school canteen
- fundraising activities
- celebrations
- sporting events
- camps and excursions.

Children can become confused when different parts of the school communicate conflicting messages –for example, when foods are described as "bad" in lessons but sold in the canteen or used during celebrations. A food-friendly school aims to create messages that are realistic, respectful and aligned.

Consider how food is used across school activities

Food is an important part of many school experiences, including celebrations, cultural events and community activities.

Schools can reflect on how food is included by asking:

- Is food being used to create connection and enjoyment?
- Are all children able to participate?
- Are students with allergies, sensory differences or dietary requirements included?
- Are celebrations focused on the experience rather than the food itself?

A food-friendly approach does not remove food from school life. Instead, it ensures food is included in ways that are positive, inclusive and respectful.

Support inclusion through food policies

Every school community includes children with different experiences, needs and relationships with food.

Policies should consider:

- allergies and medical needs
- cultural and religious practices
- sensory differences
- neurodivergent students
- food insecurity
- accessibility and inclusion.

A food-friendly school ensures that safety practices are balanced with children's dignity and belonging.

Eating times should be safe, respectful and free from judgement. By avoiding pressure, comparison and unnecessary comments about food, schools can help children develop confidence, autonomy and positive relationships with eating.

CREATING POSITIVE FOOD EXPERIENCES THROUGH CELEBRATIONS AND EVENTS

Celebrating connection, community and inclusion

Food is an important part of many school experiences. It brings people together, reflects culture and creates opportunities for connection and celebration.

School celebrations, classroom events and special occasions can be meaningful parts of children's education and sense of belonging. A food-friendly approach recognises that food can be included in these experiences while ensuring children are not made to feel judged, pressured or excluded because of what they eat.

The goal is not to remove food from celebrations. Instead, schools can consider how food is used and ensure celebrations support children's wellbeing, inclusion and positive relationships with eating.

Community Connection

Schools are communities made up of families with diverse cultures, traditions, values and circumstances.

Celebrations provide opportunities to:

- learn about different cultures and traditions
- strengthen relationships between students and families
- create shared experiences
- foster belonging and connection.

A food-friendly approach recognises that there is no single "right" way for a celebration to look. Schools can create inclusive experiences by considering the needs and experiences of their whole community.

FOOD FRIENDLY PRACTISES

Include food as connection, not control

Food can be a meaningful part of celebrations when it is included as an enjoyable shared experience.

Schools can support positive experiences by ensuring food is not used:

- as a reward for behaviour
- as something children must earn
- as a measure of achievement
- as a way to control participation.

Instead, food can be offered as part of a broader celebration that focuses on connection, enjoyment and community.

Avoid creating a hierarchy of celebration foods

Celebrations often involve foods that may not be part of everyday eating routines. These foods can hold cultural, social and emotional significance.

Schools can avoid messages that suggest certain celebration foods are:

- naughty
- unhealthy
- something children should feel guilty about eating
- something that must be balanced or compensated for.

Children benefit from learning that enjoying a variety of foods –including foods chosen for enjoyment, tradition or celebration –is part of a normal relationship with eating.

Create inclusive celebrations

When planning celebrations, schools can consider whether all children are able to participate safely and comfortably.

Considerations may include:

- allergies and medical needs
- cultural and religious practices
- sensory differences
- neurodivergent students
- family circumstances
- access to food.

Inclusion does not mean every child must have the same experience. It means schools thoughtfully consider how every child can feel valued and included.

Avoid pressure around eating

Children should not be pressured to eat foods provided during celebrations.

Avoid:

- encouraging children to try foods in front of peers
- requiring children to participate in food activities
- commenting on how much children eat
- making children explain why they cannot or do not want to eat something.

Consider the role of families

Families often contribute to school celebrations through shared foods, cultural experiences and community events.

Schools can work collaboratively with families by:

- providing clear communication about expectations
- respecting cultural food traditions
- considering accessibility and inclusion
- avoiding judgement about foods families provide.

Families should feel welcomed as partners in creating positive experiences for children.

Helpful Language

These suggested alternatives can help schools communicate about food in ways that are accurate, respectful and supportive of positive relationships with food.

INSTEAD OF	TRY THIS
"We have some naughty treats for our party."	We have some delicious foods to enjoy as part of our celebration.
"You can have one because you have been so good."	"Everyone is welcome to enjoy the celebration in their own way."
"Make sure you don't eat too many."	"Enjoy the foods that are available if you would like them."
"This is a healthy party."	We have planned a celebration that everyone can be included in."
"You need to try some."	"You are welcome to join in, whether you choose to eat or not."

Food is an important part of many celebrations and communities. Schools can include food in ways that promote connection, inclusion and enjoyment while protecting every child's dignity and relationship with eating.

CREATING A FOOD-FRIENDLY CANTEEN ENVIRONMENT

Aligning the food environment with positive health messages

School canteens are an important part of the school environment. They provide opportunities for children to access food, develop food literacy and experience independence and choice.

A food-friendly canteen recognises that its role extends beyond providing nutritious options. The way foods are described, displayed, discussed and offered also influences children's relationship with food.

Schools can support children's wellbeing by creating canteen environments that encourage variety, enjoyment and informed choices without creating fear, guilt or judgement around particular foods.

The goal is not to create a canteen environment where children feel controlled around food. The goal is to create an environment where children can learn about food while feeling safe and respected.

Environment Connection

Children learn about food through the environments they experience every day. The school canteen is part of the broader health education environment and provides opportunities for students to develop practical food skills, independence and confidence.

A food-friendly canteen supports the goals of health education by:

- providing opportunities to learn about food choices
- supporting accessibility and inclusion
- reflecting the diversity of the school community
- creating consistent messages about wellbeing.



FOOD FRIENDLY PRACTISES

Provide a variety of foods without judgement

School canteens can support children's nutrition by offering a variety of foods that reflect the needs and preferences of the school community.

A food-friendly approach recognises that:

- foods provide different nutrients
- children have different preferences
- enjoyment is part of eating
- cultural foods and family traditions are important.

The aim is not to create a hierarchy where some foods are seen as morally better than others, but to create an environment where children can learn about food in a respectful way.

Avoid creating 'good' and 'bad' choices

Canteens often aim to encourage nutritious choices. However, presenting foods as "good choices" and "bad choices" can unintentionally communicate that children are making good or bad decisions based on what they eat.

Instead, canteens can support children by:

- providing accessible nutritious options
- making a range of foods available
- encouraging curiosity about food
- allowing children to make choices within the options provided.

Nutrition promotion is most effective when it builds knowledge rather than fear.

Consider consistency between teaching and practice

Children notice when messages about food do not match across the school environment. For example, children may become confused when:

- classroom lessons describe certain foods negatively, but those foods are sold at the canteen
- some foods are described as "bad" but are included at celebrations
- children are taught to trust their bodies but are then monitored or judged for their choices.

A food-friendly school aims to create consistency between what children learn and what they experience.

Supporting Nutrition Through the School Canteen

A food-friendly canteen should support children's nutritional needs as well as their developing relationship with food. While parents and caregivers are responsible for making decisions about the foods their children eat, schools also have a responsibility to consider the food environment they create for students.

School canteens are an important source of food for many children and may be particularly significant for students who regularly purchase their lunch or snacks at school.

For this reason, canteens should aim to provide a broad range of nourishing, satisfying and appealing foods that contribute to children's nutritional intake across the school day. This does not mean that canteens need to eliminate sweet foods, snack foods or foods that are primarily chosen for enjoyment. Enjoyment is an important part of eating, and children benefit from experiencing a varied food environment that includes foods with different tastes, textures and nutritional profiles. A food-friendly canteen can include foods such as muffins, biscuits, ice creams or other discretionary foods without presenting them as forbidden, "bad" or morally inferior.

The focus should instead be on ensuring that nutritious foods are readily available, appealing, affordable and appropriately represented within the overall canteen offering.

Prioritising Nourishing Food Options

Canteens can support students' nutrition by prioritising foods that provide a range of nutrients and contribute to satisfying meals and snacks. Where practical, schools can consider offering foods such as:

- sandwiches, wraps and rolls with a range of fillings
- fruit and vegetables
- yoghurt and dairy or suitable alternatives
- grain-based foods such as rice, pasta or wholegrain options
- nourishing hot meals
- foods containing sources of protein and healthy fats
- water as an easily accessible drink option
- freshly prepared or minimally processed foods where practical.

The intention is not to require every food sold at school to meet a particular nutritional standard or to create a “perfect” menu. Rather, the canteen should provide a meaningful selection of foods that support children's nutritional needs and allow students to experience variety and choice.

Considering Highly Processed and Packaged Foods

Schools may also wish to review the proportion of highly processed, heavily packaged foods available through the canteen. Many packaged foods are perfectly appropriate to include in a varied diet; however, a canteen environment in which nutrient-poor, highly processed snack foods dominate the menu may provide fewer opportunities for children to access foods that contribute substantially to their nutritional intake.

Where suitable alternatives are available, schools can consider reducing reliance on foods that are primarily formulated for convenience, flavour or shelf life and instead increasing the availability of foods that offer greater nutritional value.

This is not about teaching children that processed foods are “bad” or that they should feel guilty for choosing them. It is about the responsibility of the food environment itself.

There is an important distinction between:

"This food is bad for you, so you shouldn't eat it."

and:

"Our canteen has a responsibility to provide nourishing food options because children spend a significant part of their day at school."

The first places moral judgement on the food and, by extension, on the child who chooses it. The second recognises the role of the school in creating a supportive environment.

Nutrition Without Food Morality

Providing nutritious foods and maintaining food neutrality are not opposing goals. A school can intentionally design a canteen menu that supports children's nutrition while ensuring that no food is described as "good", "bad", "junk", "naughty", "unhealthy" or something that a child should feel guilty about eating.

For example, a canteen might choose to offer a nourishing sandwich, fruit, yoghurt and a freshly prepared snack alongside a chocolate muffin or another enjoyable discretionary food. The presence of the latter does not undermine the nutritional value of the overall menu.

What matters is the message surrounding the food. Staff should avoid comments such as:

- "You should have chosen the healthy option."
- "That's junk food."
- "You don't need that."
- "That's not very nutritious."
- "You always buy the unhealthy things."
- "Good choice!"
- "That's a bad choice."

Instead, staff can provide information without judgement and allow children to make choices from the foods available.

The School's Role and the Family's Role

Schools and families have different roles in supporting children's nutrition. Parents and caregivers make decisions about the foods they provide and the foods they are comfortable with their children purchasing. Schools should respect the diversity of family preferences, cultural practices and circumstances.

At the same time, schools are responsible for the environments they create. A school cannot control everything a child eats, nor should it attempt to. It can, however, ensure that the food available within the school environment includes nourishing and satisfying choices.

This distinction is particularly important because children do not have complete control over their food environments. The foods available at home, the foods sold at school, family circumstances, culture, finances, food access and individual preferences can all influence what a child eats.

A supportive school therefore does not place the responsibility for “eating well” entirely on the child. Instead, it considers how the adults and systems around the child can make nourishing choices accessible without creating pressure, shame or fear.

Supporting Learning and Wellbeing

Nutrition is one component of children's overall health, wellbeing and capacity to participate in the school day. Adequate access to nourishing food supports children's growth and development and contributes to the broader conditions in which children can learn, concentrate and participate at school.

For this reason, the canteen should be considered part of the school's broader wellbeing and learning environment, rather than simply a retail service.

A nutritionally supportive canteen can help ensure that students have access to food that contributes to their nutritional needs throughout the school day, while a food-neutral approach ensures that this support does not come at the cost of children's psychological relationship with food.

A Balanced Approach

A food-friendly canteen therefore holds two goals at the same time:

Support children's nutrition

Provide accessible, appealing and varied foods that contribute meaningful nutritional value.

Protect children's relationship with food

Avoid moralising food, shaming choices, creating unnecessary fear or restriction, or making children feel that their food choices reflect their character.
These goals are compatible.

The aim is not to create a canteen where every food is considered “healthy” or where children are expected to make the nutritionally optimal choice every time. Nor is the aim to remove foods that are enjoyed for pleasure.

The aim is to create a food environment where nourishing foods are genuinely available and supported, enjoyment and variety are welcomed, and no child is made to feel ashamed of what they choose to eat.

School canteens are part of children's food education. By providing variety, using respectful language and creating an environment free from judgement, canteens can support both children's nutrition and their lifelong relationship with food.

PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES AROUND FOOD

Working together to support children's wellbeing

Food is an important part of children's lives, and families bring diverse experiences, cultures, values and circumstances to how food is approached at home. A food-friendly school recognises that families are partners in supporting children's wellbeing and that respectful collaboration creates the strongest foundation for children.

Schools have an important role in providing nutrition education and creating supportive environments. Families have the important role of deciding what food is available at home and within the family context.

When schools and families work together with respect, children receive consistent messages that support both their health and their relationship with food.

Partnership Connection

Schools are most effective when they build positive relationships with families and communities.

A food-friendly approach recognises that families may have different:

- cultural food traditions
- financial circumstances
- access to food
- health considerations
- beliefs and experiences around eating.

Supporting children's wellbeing requires understanding these differences rather than assuming there is one correct way for families to approach food.

Families should feel supported, not judged, when discussing children's food experiences.

FOOD FRIENDLY PRACTISES

Recognise that children are not responsible for their lunchbox

Children do not decide:

- what food is purchased
- what food is available at home
- what is packed in their lunchbox
- family financial circumstances
- cultural or dietary choices.

When adults comment on a child's lunchbox, children may feel responsible for decisions that are outside their control.

If a school has concerns about a child's food access, nutrition or wellbeing, conversations should occur privately with parents or carers.

Communicate with families without judgement

Food conversations with families should be approached with curiosity, compassion and respect.

Avoid communication that suggests:

- a family is doing something wrong
- there is only one correct way to feed children
- certain foods reflect parenting quality.

Instead, schools can focus conversations on:

- supporting the child's wellbeing
- understanding the family's circumstances
- working collaboratively to find solutions.

Respect cultural and family diversity

Food is closely connected to identity, culture, family traditions and belonging.

A food-friendly school recognises that families may share food in different ways, including:

- traditional cultural foods
- family recipes
- religious practices
- celebrations and gatherings.

Schools can create inclusive environments by valuing different food experiences rather than expecting all families to follow the same approach.

Support families through education, not pressure

Families often want reliable information about children's nutrition and wellbeing. Schools can support families by sharing information that:

- builds confidence
- focuses on evidence-based nutrition
- avoids fear-based messaging
- respects family autonomy.

Nutrition education is most effective when families feel supported rather than criticised.



Helpful Language

These suggested alternatives can help schools communicate about food in ways that are accurate, respectful and supportive of positive relationships with food.

INSTEAD OF	TRY THIS
"Your child needs to bring healthier lunches."	"We'd love to work together to support your child's wellbeing."
"There is too much processed food in their lunchbox."	"Is there anything we can do to support your child during eating times?"
"Could you please stop sending these foods?"	"We'd like to discuss how we can best support your child's needs at school."
"Your child refuses healthy foods."	"Can we talk about your child's eating experiences and what support might help?"
"They need to eat better."	"How can we work together to support their wellbeing?"

Families and schools are partners in supporting children. When food conversations are guided by respect, compassion and collaboration, children are more likely to feel safe, included and supported in their relationship with food.

OUR REFLECTION

What are we already doing well?

What is one area we would like to strengthen?

What is one small change we can implement?

When will we review our progress?

OUR COMMITMENT

As a food-friendly school, we aim to create an environment where every child can learn about nutrition while feeling safe, respected and confident around food.

Please reach out to Alyssa with any questions or comments about this framework



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