

# Food Neutrality

How food is talked about in organizational settings or eating environments can shape eating habits in both children and adults. It is important to talk about food and eating without judgement or bias. This concept is called food neutrality.

## What is Food Neutrality?

Food neutrality means creating a space where all food choices are respected and valued. It allows individuals to make their own food choices based on their unique needs, preferences, culture, and food access. Food neutrality involves understanding that no food is “good” or “bad”, and that no food is more valuable than another. In other words, it removes moral judgement from food and eating choices. When applied consistently, it can create a positive environment that encourages a healthy relationship with food.

### Benefits of Food Neutral Environments

- **Supports a healthy relationship with food** – people are less likely to develop or experience anxiety around eating, contributing to a positive eating experience.
- **Reduces shame** – people are less likely to feel judged or guilty based on the foods they choose to eat.
- **Increases food acceptance** – people often try and enjoy a greater variety of foods.
- **Promotes mindful eating** – encourages people to recognize and honour their hunger and fullness cues.

## Creating a Food Neutral Environment

### 1. Speak about all foods in neutral language

- Avoid labelling words that may oversimplify nutrition – “good/bad or healthy/unhealthy.”
- Explore foods together with curiosity and describe foods by their features outside of nutrition-quality (i.e. where food comes from, different ways to eat food, colour, flavour, texture, cultural significance, growing, harvesting, and cooking).
- Present all foods as acceptable and call them by their actual name (i.e. saying cookie instead of treat).

## 2. Create a safe eating space without food pressure

- Pressuring someone to eat or praising them for eating can encourage someone to ignore their hunger and fullness cues.
- Offer a variety of foods and allow people to decide what they would like to eat, how much they would like to eat, and what order they would like to eat the food in.

## 3. Ensure that food is not used as a reward

- Rewarding with food can cause people to associate food as a key factor in regulating their emotions. It can cause people to associate foods used as a reward as more appealing.
- Food used as a reward can also cause people to make a habit of rewarding and comforting themselves with food.
- Try offering non-food rewards instead such as a longer break, music, or games.

## 4. Avoid restricting food

- Food restrictions can create feelings of guilt or shame and can negatively influence food relationships. It can also impact a person's ability to follow their hunger and fullness cues.
- Food restrictions can also lead to fear of hunger, overeating, preoccupation with food, and poor self-regulation of food intake.
- Ensure that adequate time is given to people to eat their meal or snack.
- If a food is offered, avoid restricting amounts. If food is brought from home, avoid removing foods or commenting on the food.

## 5. Be consistent

- Creating a supportive eating environment that fosters healthy eating behaviours takes time. Be consistent with incorporating food neutrality in your organization.
- Steps to being consistent could involve staff training, visible messaging to the public, regular self-assessment or organizational review, and food policy development.



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