

# Teacher Background Information for Food & Nutrition Lesson Plans

Lesson plans were developed with an equity lens using age-appropriate food and nutrition literacy guidance with the goal of promoting a healthy relationship with food.

This document provides more information on this approach and how to apply it in the classroom.

## What is food and nutrition literacy?

Food literacy is a broad set of behaviours, skills, and mindsets about food and nutrition.

Think of it like a toolbox that helps us feel comfortable and confident with food. It's not just about knowing which nutrients are in your food—it's also about building the skills, habits, and attitudes that support healthy eating patterns.

## What is age-appropriate guidance for nutrition education?

Age-appropriate nutrition education aligns with the different roles parents/caregivers and children play in the home regarding food and it matches the stages of a child's cognitive development. The focus is on food exploration, skill building, and practical knowledge for development of healthy eating patterns.

## How do the stages of cognitive development impact food and nutrition education?

Children's ability to integrate and apply nutrition messaging is impacted by their age and stage of cognitive development. Content for lesson plans and resources was guided by research<sup>1</sup> and our understanding of what is developmentally appropriate, i.e., how children think and translate information at different ages.

## Why is it recommended to use neutral language when talking about food?

What you say can shape a child's relationship with food. Attaching judgement to food, such as "good" or "bad", may lead to students feeling "good" or "bad" for eating those foods. It can also lead to guilt, shame, and stress around eating, which can create an unhealthy relationship with food. Emerging evidence also suggests that focusing on the negative aspects of food does not lead to healthier eating behaviours in children.<sup>3</sup>

You can practice using neutral language by calling food by its name, describing sensory aspects and focusing on the ways food provides for the body. When foods, such as candy, chips or chocolate are labeled as 'treats' or 'special foods', it makes these foods more desirable than other foods. Note: referring to the sections of the Canada's food guide plate is considered neutral as it is based on nutrient composition, without any judgement.

For more strategies, visit: [Ways Educators Can Promote a Healthy Relationship with Food](#).

Guidance on what foods to offer or sell for the school population is different from teaching kids how to make individual food choices. Classifying foods by their nutrient content — by using terms such as “offer most often” — can be helpful for school policies, menu planning, and making sure everyone has a shared understanding of what kinds of foods and drinks should be available.

## How can I promote a healthy relationship with food?

The [AHS Healthy Relationship with Food](#) web page includes resources and learning opportunities for supporting a healthy relationship with food

## What are the different roles of students, parents/caregivers, and schools when selecting food, eating, and regulation behaviours?

Classroom resources, activities, and lesson plans were developed according to the different roles of parents, students and schools play in fostering a healthy relationship with food for children and youth. The table below is adapted from Ellen Satter’s Division of Responsibility in Feeding. <sup>2</sup>

	Parents/Caregivers	Students	Schools
Role	Decide <b>what</b> foods are packed for lunch and snacks.	Decide if, <b>how much</b> and the order they eat the food available to them.  As students get older, they may choose from what is available from home or if purchasing food from school.	Plan <b>when</b> and <b>where</b> food is eaten during the school day.  If providing food, the school would determine <b>what</b> foods are sold or offered to students.

For more information on mealtime roles, visit: [Ways Educators Can Promote a Healthy Relationship with Food](#).

Parents and caregivers are responsible for buying and providing food for the family. It’s important for children to trust that their parent or caregiver is doing their best with what they have.

## How can I teach about nutrition knowing that all students have varying access to food?

As mentioned earlier, parents and caregivers are responsible for providing the foods packed in a student’s lunch or snacks. Students don’t control what’s available at home, and things like income, culture, and family routines can all influence food choices.

When students take part in classroom activities about food, encourage them to list a variety of foods they enjoy and have access to. Examples may include fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruits, different types of protein foods (both animal-and plant-based), and a range of grains — including non-whole grain options.

Health Canada's [Toolkit for Educators](#) offers guidance on how to talk about food access and safe drinking water in a supportive way. The "Varying Access to Food" section includes helpful suggestions. If you're concerned about a student due to an ongoing food-related issue, follow your school's policies and procedures. It's important to take a family-centered approach, rather than speaking directly with the student about the concern.

## When teaching Canada's food guide, how do I respond when students ask about foods that are not shown or promoted as part of the food guide?

Not all foods we eat are listed in Canada's food guide. In the classroom, students might mention other foods they enjoy — like birthday cake or processed snacks.

You can help keep the conversation neutral by gently guiding it back, using examples from resources like [Create a Supportive Environment](#) (Health Canada).

## How can I consider culture and food traditions when teaching?

Culture and tradition are important aspects of healthy eating. Health Canada's [Toolkit for Educators](#) also offers ideas for teaching students about different cultures and food traditions. It includes [tips on creating a supportive and inclusive environment](#) when sharing and enjoying food in the classroom.

Visit Health Canada's [Toolkit for Educators](#) to learn about the importance of recognizing and reflecting on personal [biases related to food and eating practices](#). Everyone brings their own experiences with food into the classroom. Being aware of these biases is key to creating an inclusive and respectful learning environment.

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AHS Nutrition Services acknowledges that additional content reflective of Indigenous ways of knowing, traditional foods and acknowledgment of the role of colonization and residential schools on Indigenous food systems and patterns of eating are important considerations for food and nutrition lesson plans. We continue to seek ways to incorporate these aspects in a spirit of reconciliation.

## References

1. Slater J. Food Literacy Progression: A Framework of Food Literacy Development for Children and Youth from 2-18 Years [Internet]. FANLit. 2022. Available from: [https://www.fanlit.org/\\_files/ugd/1692f6\\_f774e06a4f9e487996c6e1f53a46c8fe.pdf](https://www.fanlit.org/_files/ugd/1692f6_f774e06a4f9e487996c6e1f53a46c8fe.pdf)
2. Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding. [Internet]. Ellen Satter Institute. 2023. Available from: <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/sDOR-in-feedng.pdf>
3. Binder A, Naderer B, Matthes J. The effects of gain-and loss-framed nutritional messages on children's healthy eating behaviour. Public Health Nutr. 2020;23(10):1726–34.

