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Love Your Lunch

A Resource for Teachers and Lunch Monitors to Help
End Lunchbox Shaming in School



September 19, 2024 is Love Your Lunch Day. You can participate by talking to students about the importance of lunch inclusivity and acceptance in the classroom. This resource includes conversation starters and activities to help.

The Situation:

A recent survey by Sistema, a company that designs versatile and functional food storage and lunch boxes, over one in four (26%) Canadian parents say that their child has experienced lunchbox shaming in elementary school. Some groups reported higher rates of lunchbox bullying, with 40% of new Canadians reporting their children experiencing it at school.

This issue disproportionately affects children and families from Black, Southeast Asian, Latin American and South Asian communities, who were twice as likely to say that their child has experienced lunchbox shaming than White parents.

Lunch shaming hurts children. When they're teased by classmates for their "stinky" or "gross" lunches, kids often hide their food or eat less. Nearly half of them (46%) feel so strongly that they ask their parents to pack different lunches to help them fit in.

What's Behind It:

A lunchbox holds more than food. It's how families show their care and support. A packed lunch is a meal, but it's also a little slice of home that goes to school with a child. Lunches reflect the culinary traditions, family dynamics and social norms of the people who pack them. The rainbow of colours, flavours, textures, shapes and smells that fill a classroom reflect the rich diversity within the school community. Each family knows what's right for their child to eat, and it's your job to ensure that this is valued and you can play a role in ensuring this is valued and respected.

Sistema's mission is to help all kids have the confidence to eat the foods they love at home, in the school environment without fear of shame and bullying.

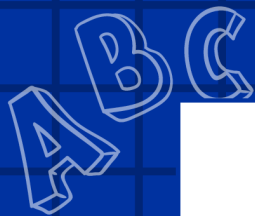
Why it's Important:

Kids need fuel to function and learn, so it's essential they eat what they bring. Their lunch experience impacts their overall sense of well-being at school, nourishing them beyond just providing nutrients:

- It helps them feel comfortable at school
- It helps promote feelings of belonging and social identity
- It helps them develop social relationships and connect with their peers, teachers and family members

Lunch shaming negatively impacts children by causing feelings of shame and inferiority, social withdrawal, decreased self-esteem and increased stress. Skipping lunch or eating less food leaves kids hungry, making it harder for them to learn and participate in school activities.





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How You Can Make a Difference:



Be clear about roles:

Teachers can help create a positive atmosphere around lunchtime. School rules likely dictate when and where children eat and how much time is allotted for lunch, but you have a major influence on the lunchroom dynamic.

Parents and caregivers should decide what food is provided in their child's lunch.

The child's role is to eat. They should decide how much and in what order they eat the foods in their lunch. Children will eat when they feel safe and comfortable.

Create the Culture:

Set the expectation that ALL food is accepted in your classroom and that children should feel comfortable eating the foods they bring from home in whatever order they want.

Work with your students to create ground rules for acceptable language and behaviour around food in your classroom. Make it clear that bullying and shaming won't be tolerated. Include this in your classroom agreement at the beginning of the year if this is part of your practice.

Communication home about lunch must address safety and food allergy issues, but other than that it shouldn't dictate what parents and caregivers send for lunch. Instead, messages can focus on positive reminders such as:

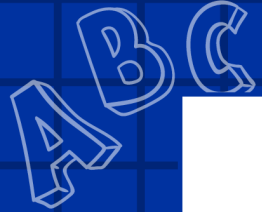
- Sending foods that their children like
- Sending enough food to meet their child's individual needs
- Ensuring their child can open and manage all the containers and foods in their lunchbox



Lead by Example: Be a role model through your words and actions around food

- Don't use judgmental language or value-based labels to talk about foods or group them—e.g., “good/bad,” “healthy/unhealthy,” “every day/sometimes”
- Call all foods by their actual names (carrots, chips, cookies, curry)
- Show students what's in your lunch and the reasons why you love it
- Use descriptive words to talk about how food looks, smells, sounds and tastes
- Don't comment on what or how much any child is eating (or not) during lunch
- Model curiosity when talking about diverse lunches and foods





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Tips for Ending Lunchbox Shaming



Recognize It:

Be aware of behaviour that indicates lunch shaming or bullying is happening, e.g., children hiding or covering their lunch, eating less or not eating lunch, or acting differently than usual at lunchtime.

Respond:

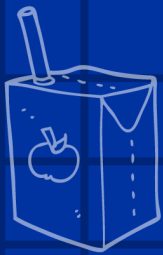
Talk to children when you see lunch shaming happening. Reinforce your classroom expectations and ensure that children feel supported. Refer to your school's anti-bullying policies and seek additional support from school counsellors if necessary.

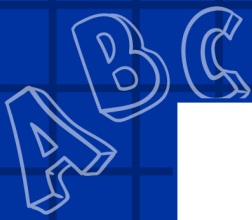
Explore, Discover and Learn Together:

Take a CURIOUS approach to food in your classroom at lunchtime and beyond! Invite children to lead with curiosity and use their senses as they explore and learn about all the different types of lunches their peers have. Food diversity provides a rich opportunity to nurture acceptance, learning and pride. Look for ways to involve students' families and connect food to subjects across the curriculum.

Lead The Change:

Love Your Lunch Day is September 19, 2024! Join the movement to promote lunch inclusivity by celebrating this day in your classroom. We're making it easy by providing ideas and activities to help spark conversation and fuel positive change with your students.





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Love Your Lunch Classroom Activities



These can all be adapted to suit the grade level, interests and abilities of your students.

“We Love Our Lunch” Poster

Create this as an activity with your students. Brainstorm ideas and create a poster to display in your classroom or lunchroom or share online. Create a school-wide display to showcase the work from each class.

What to include:

- Why We Love Our Lunches: – statements, photos, art from students
- What’s in the Lunches We Love: names of foods, colours, shapes, flavours, smells, sounds, textures, ingredients, spices
- Where our lunches come from: the countries, cultures and people who make them.
- How we show respect for everyone and their lunch: words and actions we use in our class and what we don’t accept.

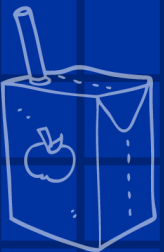
Visual Art

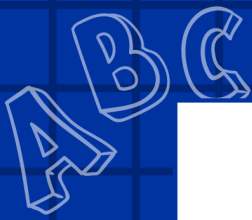
Invite children to create artwork representing their lunch using different materials.

Written Language

Invite children to express why they love their lunch and their feelings about lunch shaming. Here are some sample prompts:

- Names of foods. Invite children to teach their classmates words for their lunch foods in different languages. Create a visual display of all the different words and images of the foods.
- Explore food with the senses and use various descriptive words to express colours, shapes, flavours, smells, tastes and feelings evoked by different foods.
- Write stories about their lunch, who makes it and why they love it.
- Research and share the history and origins of foods in their lunch.
- Write about a favourite lunchtime experience or memory.
- What happens when something that you think is yummy is strange to others?
- How can we use curious and respectful language to respond to unfamiliar foods?
- What comments could you make instead of these to help classmates feel good about their lunches:
 - “Ew! What’s that?”
 - “That smells gross!”
 - “Your lunch looks weird.”





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Love Your Lunch Classroom Activities



Math/Numeracy

Explore and learn about different lunches and foods in your class and share data and findings in various ways:

- Count, sort, and graph or represent the number of different types of foods in your class lunches and the colours, shapes, flavours, and sizes students notice in the foods.
- Count and represent how many different places the lunch foods in your classroom come from and how many lunches have similar origins.
- Measure, sort, represent and compare the differences in shapes and sizes of different foods using different tools if possible.

Music and Movement

Invite children to create a chant, song, dance or skit expressing what's in their lunch, why they love their lunch and how they respect everyone's lunch at school.

Video and Multimedia Projects:

- **Video Creation:** Invite students to create short videos or animations highlighting the importance of respecting diverse lunches. These can be shared on the school's social media channels and during assemblies.
- **Digital Storytelling:** Use digital storytelling tools to help students create multimedia presentations about their favourite lunches and the cultural stories behind them.

Connect with Families

Invite family members into your classroom to view exhibits and displays and share stories about their cultural foods. Provide tasting of foods if appropriate and viable.

Ideas for School-Wide Events

- Showcase individual student or classroom "Love Your Lunch" projects and displays at school assemblies, curriculum nights and other school-wide and community events.
- Invite local chefs from different cultures for a community event to lead a cooking demonstration featuring culturally specific foods.
- Create a "Love Your Lunch" cookbook to showcase different foods and provide recipes from the students and families in your class or school community.

This resource has been co-created by [Sistema](#) and [Rainbow Plate](#).

About Love Your Lunch Day

To tackle the issue of lunchbox bullying, Sistema has launched the Love Your Lunch Day with the goal of starting a conversation about food diversity and creating a more inclusive school environment where all types of lunches are accepted. Canadians are urged to participate in Love Your Lunch Day by talking to their kids and students about the importance of lunch inclusivity and acceptance.

To sign up for updates, visit www.LoveYourLunchDay.ca.

