



Healthy v. Unhealthy? Talking about Balance

Research tells us that talking about 'healthy eating' isn't very engaging or motivating, in fact it can often have the reverse effect of the one that we are aiming for.

Using the words 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' when talking about individual foods is an unhelpful practice. More often than not, what children like to eat corresponds with the unhealthy list and the things we would like them to eat more of are on the disliked list – which doesn't get us off to a good start.

What do we do when we are told we cannot have something, or something isn't good for us? Often we want it all the more. When something is denied, the intensity of wanting it increases.

The skill of the teacher/practitioner is to convey:

- Which food groups food/drink belongs to
- What food from each food groups does for our bodies
- In what amounts and how regularly we should eat them

Sounds easy but there are many mixed messages and lots are open to interpretation - what one person deems as moderation for example, another doesn't.

It is really important that we help children establish positive relationships with all foods. They live in a time and an environment where making good choices isn't always easy – aggressive marketing; lack of parental confidence; blurred boundaries on when/how much/what to eat; lack of family cooking skills; access to convenience food; foods used as rewards/bribes/treats which encourage an emotional reliance; increased sedentary lifestyles... the list is endless.

We want children to understand, in an age appropriate way, that we need to eat the right amounts, a balance of everything. So all of your 'healthy eating' work should be about understanding that there are **certain foods we should eat lots of and regularly and other foods we should eat less of and not so often.**

Are you keen to extend your setting's work in this area?

You might be interested in the Director of Public Health Award – Balanced Packed lunch Programme. . .

The 'Healthy Outcomes Certificate - Early Years' or 'HOCEY' is awarded to settings which have shown a significant impact in supporting healthy eating (and physical activity) outcomes, by carrying out interventions. One of the outcomes which settings can choose is, 'to promote and improve the balance of packed lunches brought from home.'

The Packed Lunch Programme is a set of resources, created by the DPH Award team as an intervention to support this outcome. The programme includes staff training, 6 weeks of activities for children, information for families as well as resources, background information and guidance for practitioners.

To find out more, please go to:

<https://www.directorofpublichealthaward.org.uk/content/healthy-outcomes-certificate-early-years>