



# Creating a Supportive Food Environment at School

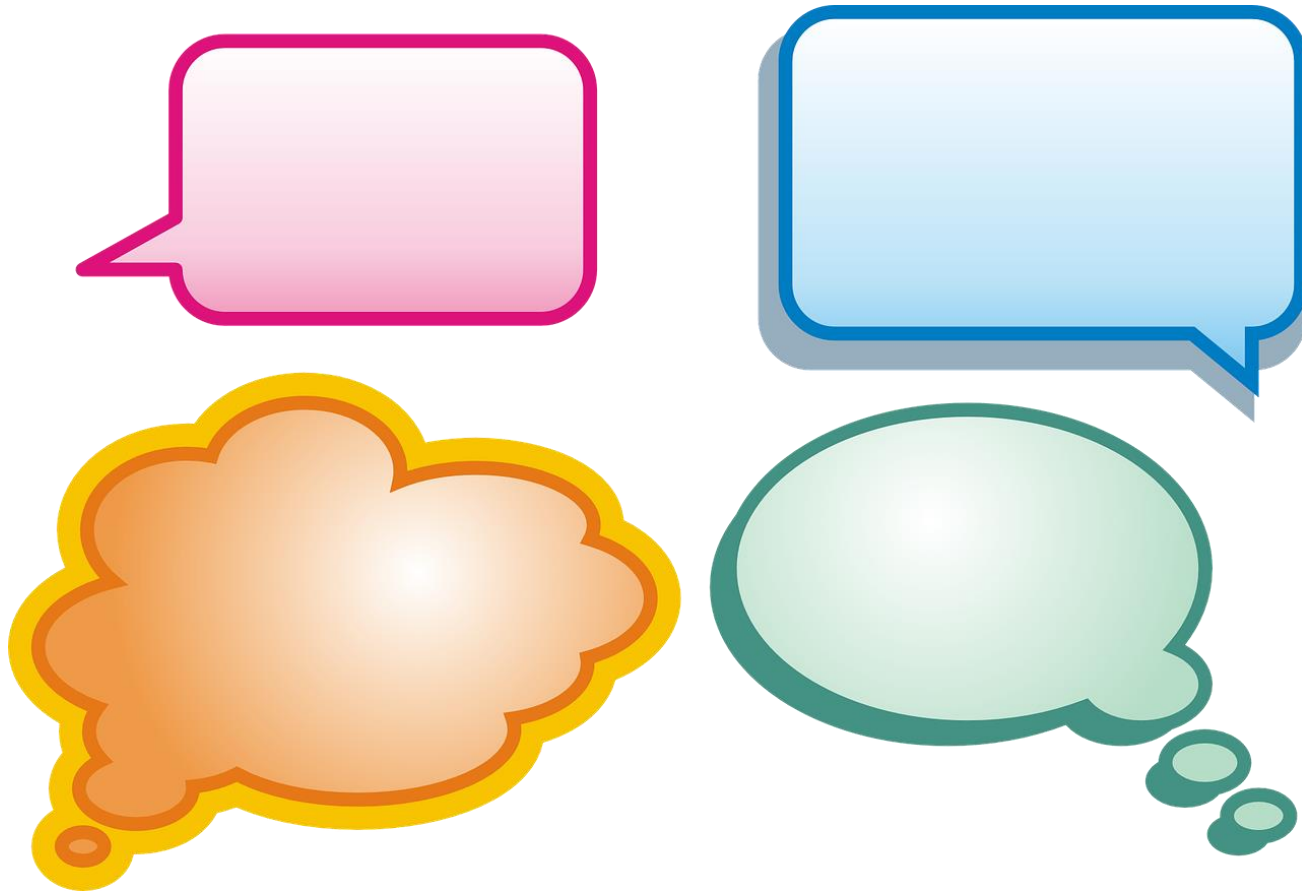


# Learning Goals:

1. Understand why language matters
2. Introduce concept of food neutral approach and the benefits
3. Provide guiding principles for food and nutrition discussion in the school setting
4. Increase awareness of nutrition resources
5. Increase confidence of educators in using food neutral language in the school community



# How We Talk About Food & Bodies Matters



# Language Around Food

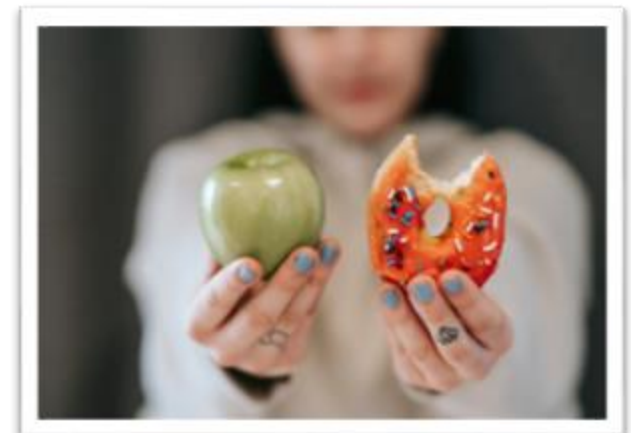
- Food can be a sensitive topic
- An obsession with healthy eating can lead to unhealthy habits
- Labeling foods can cause feelings of shame and guilt
- Families can face barriers to eating well
- Simple messages don't capture the complexity of nutrition and eating habits



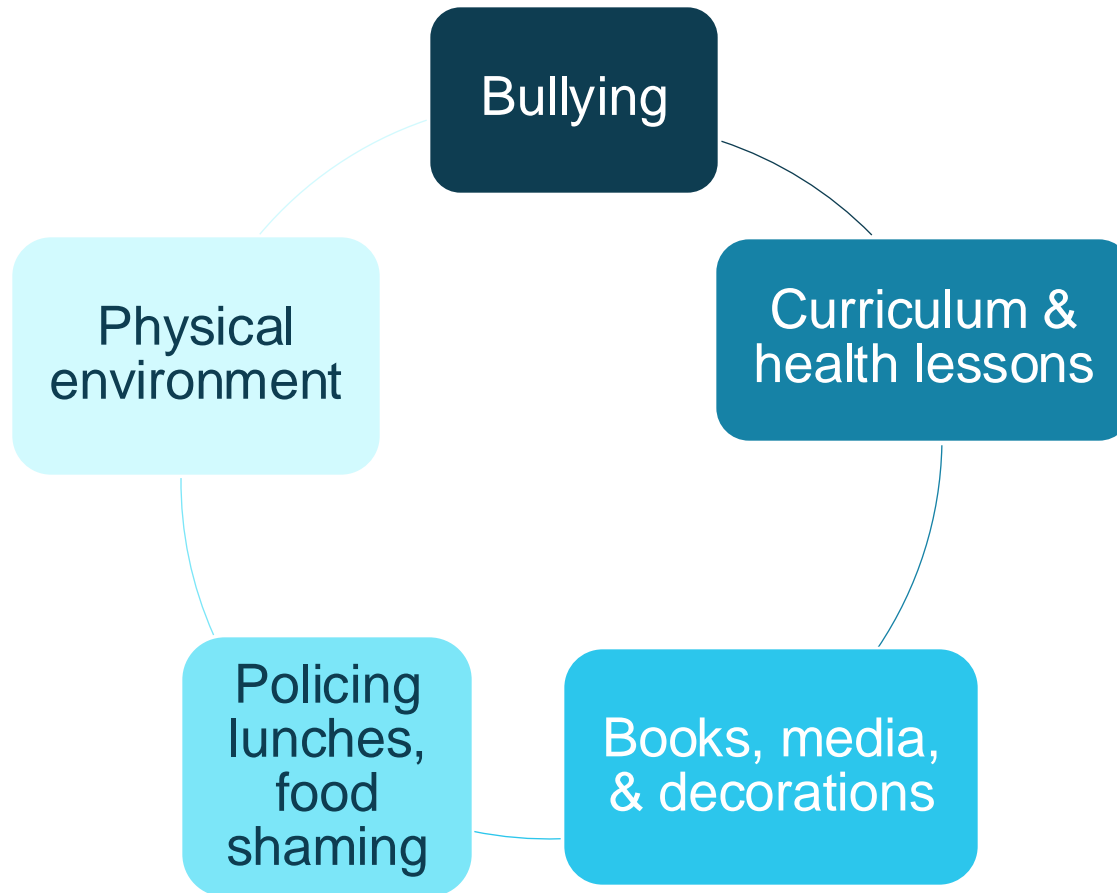
(Fotografierende, n.d.)

# Diet Culture

- Viewing thinness as ideal and fatness as negative
- Linking someone's food choices to their moral worth
- Encourages dieting or food restriction as the main way to be healthy
- Classifies foods or establishes a food hierarchy
- Equates energy intake with energy expenditure
- Believes individuals have complete control over their health



# Diet Culture in Schools



# Why a Shift is Needed

- Messages promoting “healthy eating” can be harmful
  - Can contribute to eating disorders and disordered eating
  - Maintains weight stigma (stereotypes and misconceptions about people based on their weight, shape, or size)
- Emphasis on the nutrition of foods to promote positive eating habits may not be effective
  - Food choices are influenced by taste, preferences, and familiarity



# The Food Neutral Approach

- Allows all foods to fit and sees them as having equal moral value
- Avoids categorizing foods as good, bad, healthy, or unhealthy
- Removes of judgement associated with food
- Supports the development of a positive and trusting relationship with our bodies



(Ayrton, 2021)



# Benefits of Adopting a Food Neutral Approach in your Classroom

- Supports a positive relationship with food
- Supports autonomy and awareness of following natural hunger cues
- Promotes a positive relationship with the body, self-esteem, confidence and resilience which can foster mental well-being
- Contributes to the development of age-appropriate skills
- Lowers likelihood of developing eating disorders

# Practicing Food Neutrality

- Identify your own food rules & biases
- Reflect on your eating behaviours
- Change your language

Not all foods are nutritionally equal, but they should be morally equal



(Cottonbro, 2020)

# Applying Food Neutrality Principles at School

- Use food neutral language
- Respect individual choices. All foods have value.
- Provide non-food rewards
- Be a role model to students
- Recognize how food supports more than physical health
- Eat together. Celebrate how food connects us
- Provide hands-on learning with food using the senses
- Keep personal opinions about food or bodies to ourselves



# Food & Nutrition at School

- The school is responsible for providing regular meal/snack breaks and structure around eating times
  - ▶ When food is offered, schools have a responsibility to follow nutrition guidelines and standards
  - ▶ Keep nutrition education for instructional time and focus on connection and enjoying meal together when eating
  - ▶ Avoid commenting on students' food, or how much/in what order they eat it

# Reflection

- How you talk about food with your students, family & friends, and coworkers
- Start tuning in to media messages about food & weight
- Recognize your own personal biases around food, weight, & health



# Resources

- Websites/Resources:
  - ▶ Nuton.ca
  - ▶ Dietitians4Teachers
  - ▶ [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#)
  - ▶ [BrightBites](#)
  - ▶ [10 Ways to Create a Supportive Food Environment in Schools](#)
  - ▶ [Canada's Food Guide](#)
- Podcasts
  - ▶ [Teacher Fan Club: Challenging Diet Culture Series](#)
- ▶ Registered Dietitian Services
  - ▶ Health Connect Ontario (811) – free registered dietitian services
  - ▶ Registered dietitians at hospitals, health centres, family doctors/family health teams
  - ▶ Dietitians of Canada: Find a Dietitian: private practice directory

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