

## TABLE 1: Teaching and Talking to Students About Food and Nutrition

This resource provides examples for a food exploration approach to food and nutrition education. It may present entirely new ways of talking and teaching about food to students that may take time to feel comfortable and confident with using. The **Teach Food First** toolkit offers lessons and activities for K-8 classrooms that use food exploration and connect to Canada’s Food Guide.

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Try this, instead of:	Rationale
<p><b>Try this:</b> Letting students determine whether, how much, and what order to eat of the food that is offered to them.</p> <p><b>Instead of:</b> Focusing on how much or in what order student should eat their food (e.g., eat your sandwich before you can have your cookie!)</p>	<p>When children are pressured to eat a food, they are less likely to choose to eat that food later on. They also learn that some foods are “better” than others. Keeping the focus away from what, how much, or what foods students eat can help them feel more relaxed at snack and mealtimes.</p>
<p><b>Try this:</b> Inspiring curiosity about food through experiential learning and food exploration.</p> <p><b>Instead of:</b> Emphasizing the health benefits of specific foods (e.g., you need to eat certain foods to “be healthy”.)</p>	<p>Eating is a sensory experience and food is best explored through the senses. Emphasizing health benefits does not support learning to accept foods and can lead to anxiety for some students.</p> <p>Focusing on building skills related to growing, identifying, and preparing foods can go further in supporting the life-long enjoyment of a variety of nutritious foods.</p>
<p><b>Try this:</b> Providing students with repeated, neutral exposures to a certain food or different foods (e.g., reading about it, seeing it, touching it, growing it, watching others eat it, without any pressure to try it)</p> <p><b>Instead of:</b> Telling students to try or eat a food (e.g., just try it, you’ll like it!) or praising them when they do.</p>	<p>All children differ in how they approach foods. Some may like a new food right away, and some may take many exposures (e.g., 15 or more to that food) before being willing to try it.</p> <p>When children are told to eat certain foods, it can come across as pressure. Removing pressure makes space for curiosity, exploration, and learning at one’s own pace.</p>

<p><b>Try this:</b> Talking about food in a neutral manner.</p> <p><b>Instead of:</b> Labeling foods as “healthy” and “unhealthy”, or “green light”/“red light”.</p>	<p>Research shows that children are less likely to try foods that are labeled as “healthy” and may assume these foods are less tasty.</p> <p>Labelling foods this way promotes “all or none” thinking without considering the many factors that influence eating patterns including personal preference, food availability, socioeconomic and family situation, pleasure, convenience, culture, and food skills.</p>
<p><b>Try this:</b> Explaining that eating looks different to everyone and will depend on their family situation, culture and many other factors.</p> <p><b>Instead of:</b> Focusing on one type of eating pattern or one way of eating.</p>	<p>Eating patterns encouraged within Canada’s food guide are flexible, diverse and include foods that hold culture, personal or religious significance (and that are available and accessible, economically or otherwise) to students and their families.</p>
<p><b>Try this:</b> Referring to foods by their actual name.</p> <p><b>Instead of:</b> Referring to foods as “junk” or “treat” foods.</p>	<p>Labelling foods as “treats” can put them on a pedestal and give them “special status”, often making the foods seem more appealing. Even though certain foods may be offered less often, they can still be described as “food”.</p>
<p><b>Try this:</b> Recognizing how food supports our social and mental wellbeing; honouring foods’ connection to culture, tradition, history, community, and the land.</p> <p><b>Instead of:</b> Focusing solely on “food as fuel” or eating only for physical health.</p>	<p>Food is a source of enjoyment and can hold deep personal and cultural meaning.</p> <p>Food education is most meaningful when it considers all these aspects and helps students connect food to their lived experiences.</p>
<p><b>Try this:</b> Exploring food and building food skills (learning about how and where it grows, how it gets to our plates, different ways it can be eaten and prepared).</p> <p><b>Instead of:</b> Focusing on the nutrients that foods contain</p>	<p>Research shows that activities that help students build food literacy skills have a much greater impact than lessons about nutrients.</p>

**Try this:**

Talking about what food gives us now, in the present moment (e.g. enjoyment, comfort, connection to friends and family, the energy to grow, play and learn).

**Instead of:**

Focusing on making food choices to limit the risk for chronic disease or other negative health outcomes.

The idea that food choices cause disease is oversimplified and can stigmatize people living with chronic disease. The causes of disease are complex and are strongly associated with social determinants of health such as income, access to resources, education, and housing.