



## ***Eating in the Classroom***

The way we talk about and present food can leave a lasting impact on young people. It's important that we facilitate nurturing environments where students can feel *comfortable to choose* what they want to eat without judgment. Setting up a nurturing, positive space for kids to explore their own food choices is a great way to help children develop confidence and comfort around new foods.

We love school gardens (and eating in season) for lots of reasons, one being that it seems to inspire us to try new foods. The novelty of picking and eating something so fresh is inspiring. Eating fresh from the garden sometimes provides proof that something that is "good" for you CAN also taste good.

Getting hands on and familiar with a variety of foods is one of the best ways to develop nutrition education and support students to feel positive about eating. Consistently offering diverse, nourishing options and letting students choose what and how much they want to eat allows students to learn to enjoy nutritious foods, over time and at their own pace.

Having students see their peers trying something new can be encouraging and motivating. However, we don't want to place pressure on children to try things if they are resistant, as this can cause students to feel anxious and shut down.

It is our role as adults to provide options and set the times for eating. It is the kids role to choose what and how much they want to eat. It's important that we give our kids this opportunity to be in control of what and how much they eat. Trusting and supporting students to make these choices for themselves sets them up for a healthy life-long relationship with food.

Younger children have heightened taste buds, so trying new foods can be a really intense experience. Lots of kids (and adults) have never been taught HOW to actually taste food. In our workshops we want kids to consider and identify exactly WHAT they might like / dislike about a particular food without labeling it as good / bad. We want to allow space for kids to not like foods and not pressure them into eating something they don't want. However, we can still encourage trying new things and think about how foods taste to identify exactly WHAT we don't like about them with neutral language.

This is what is called "tasting like a chef" and gets kids to step into the role of the chef. This can only be done with practice! We want kids to try to describe the items that they taste using some of the following example identifiers.

## ***Taste Like a Chef***

Use these kinds of words (and others!) to describe what you are trying:



## ***Principles to Follow When Tasting Food with Students***

- ★ Always be positive.
- ★ Acknowledge even the smallest effort.
- ★ Don't allow students (or yourself) to declare food as “good” or “bad” – food is not a moral imperative.
  - It's fine not to like something personally, but students should be encouraged to express *why* they don't like it.
  - Students can't say that they don't like something they've never tried before, they can say they're nervous to try it and we should express that it's an ok feeling and understandable.
- ★ Try not to use terms such as “healthy” or “unhealthy” when describing foods. Telling students that they must eat a certain way to “be healthy” can lead to stress and anxiety, particularly if they have not yet learned to accept those foods. Healthy and unhealthy implies good and bad, and food is not a moral imperative. In fact, it can be good to eat a cookie once in a while.
- ★ Tough love does not work with students who are nervous - try to take a supportive approach.
- ★ Find ways to include more food cautious or anxious students, instead of them not participating.
- ★ If a child starts to shut down and withdraw from the activity, *let them be*.
  - They can set their own limitations and come back to the activity when they're ready.
  - Encourage them to continue to watch other students.
  - Ensure it's ok for a child to say “today isn't my day to try this.”
  - Support and celebrate student's choice.
- ★ Don't focus on children who have a strong negative reaction to tasting something new.
  - Encourage them to describe what they don't like without using words like gross or disgusting (try to taste like a chef).
- ★ Remind students that our taste buds change over time and it's important to keep trying new things.
- ★ Discuss your own past negative experiences with food and your experience with struggling to like healthy / new / unfamiliar foods and how you overcame this.