FOOD NEUTRALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

WHAT IS FOOD NEUTRALITY?

Food neutrality is a concept related to promoting a balanced and healthy relationship with food, devoid of judgment or moral value attached to specific foods. It encourages an attitude where no food is inherently "good" or "bad," and individuals can make choices based on their preferences, nutritional needs, and overall well-being without feelings of guilt or shame.

HOW TO USE FOOD NEUTRALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

You can start making changes to how you talk about food in your classroom right away! Transforming the language we use around food can be challenging, given our upbringing and past teachings. However, here are some changes you can begin to implement:

- Present all foods with enthusiasm to encourage curiosity
- Refrain from categorizing foods into groups such as healthy vs. unhealthy, or good vs. bad
- Adopt an exploratory approach to food by engaging the senses
- Allow students to have preferences
- Avoid attaching shame or judgment to foods or other people
- Be body positive

TOP TIPS FOR CREATING A FOOD NEUTRAL CLASSROOM

1. Start off by just calling food by its name. Challenge yourself to not use the terms: healthy, unhealthy, yummy, or yuck when eating with kids. Instead, focus on the colour, texture and other aspects of the food. For example, it's not a "healthy apple", it's a "red apple," "green apple," or Granny Smith apple."

2. Use sensory terms to describe different foods such as crunchy, bitter, tasty, round, or green.

3. Provide nutritious options. We can be a role model to children by modeling healthy behaviours and always providing healthy, nutritious options, whether we label them as healthy or not.

4. Work on conceptual ideas rather than content knowledge on nutrition. Food is so much more than nutrition. Make it fun! Explore the food, where it comes from, how it's grown, and how it makes us feel. When children become a bit older, we can introduce some of the scientific aspects of nutrition in a neutral way.

5. Let children trust their bodies. If they are hungry, let them have seconds. If they are not hungry, don't tell them they must eat everything on their plate.

6. Most importantly, talk about food in a safe way, so we don't create an unnecessary fear around food.