

## Positive mealtimes

Feeding children and nurturing healthy eating is a shared job. Parents, schools and students each have a defined role in eating.

**Parents** decide what food is provided from home. If food is provided by the school, such as in the canteen, they choose what is offered on these occasions.

**Schools** decide when and where students eat.

**Students** decide how much, in what order and whether they eat.

This means that, as a school, you can take the focus off the 'what' and 'how much' students eat and focus on making mealtimes enjoyable. Creating a positive, relaxed and social mealtime can help children to build healthy eating behaviours. You can do this by:

- respecting food sent from home
- trusting children know how much they need to eat
- removing any pressure around food and eating.

### Respecting food sent from home

- It is important to remember that families define 'healthy food' in different ways.
- A parent's food choices are influenced by many things. Family values and access to food (including the food they can afford) will influence the food they buy. The child's food preferences and food skills will also influence the food in the lunchbox.
- Respecting food brought from home helps to build trust with students and families.
- Taking food away from a student or negatively commenting on food brought from home can lead to feelings of shame or guilt. Students need to trust that their caregivers are feeding them the best way they can.

#### At mealtimes

- Let students eat and enjoy the food sent from home without providing comment

# Move Well Eat Well

## Trust children know how much they need to eat

- Children are born knowing when they are hungry and when they are full.
- Children can lose touch with their hunger and fullness cues when adults interfere. Putting pressure on a child to eat more or less is a common way of interfering.
- Giving children control over what and how much they eat helps them to explore foods without pressure. It also helps them to have trust in their body.
- It can be difficult at first to trust children know how much to eat. Their food intake can vary from meal to meal and day to day. Placing trust in children gives them the best chance of building a life-long healthy relationship with food.

### At mealtimes

- Let students eat food from their lunch box in any order they choose
- Let students eat as much or as little as they are hungry for
- Respect students when they say they are hungry or full
- Encourage children to check in with their internal body cues. To check if a child has finished eating, you might ask “*what does your tummy say?*” or “*does your tummy feel like it has had enough?*”



# Move Well Eat Well

## Remove any pressure around food

- Comments about 'what' or 'how much' children are eating at mealtimes are a form of pressure. This includes well-meaning comments like *"eat your sandwich before you have your biscuits"* or *"have a few more bites before you go and play"*.
- Positive praise is also a form of pressure. This includes comments like *"good girl for eating your apple"* or *"well done for eating all your lunch"*.
- Pressure at mealtimes encourages children to eat for external reasons. Over time, they may eat in certain ways to seek praise or avoid criticism. This makes it harder for them to listen to their internal body cues.
- Pressure can also make some foods seem more appealing or like a 'reward'. This will make it harder for children to learn to enjoy eating a variety of foods on their own.
- Shifting the focus away from 'what' or 'how much' children are eating can help them to relax around food and enjoy mealtimes.

### At mealtimes:

- Avoid commenting on 'what' or 'how much' students are eating
- Praise students for their manners or behaviour, rather than for their eating. For example:
  - *"I see you tried really hard to stay sitting while we ate"*
  - *"Thank you for putting your rubbish in the bin"*
  - *"You did a great job at remembering to wash your hands"*

## How can I support families?

- If you have any concerns or issues about food sent from home, talk with parents directly. Avoid communicating concerns through the child.
- Support **all** families by promoting practical food ideas that support the MVEW messages:
  - [Tap into water](http://www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/families/tap_into_water_everyday) - [http://www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/families/tap\\_into\\_water\\_everyday](http://www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/families/tap_into_water_everyday)
  - [Plant fruit and vegetables in your lunchbox](http://www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/families/plant_fruit_and_veg_in_your_lunchbox) - [http://www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/families/plant\\_fruit\\_and\\_veg\\_in\\_your\\_lunchbox](http://www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/families/plant_fruit_and_veg_in_your_lunchbox)
  - [Limit sometimes foods](http://www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/families/limit_sometimes_foods) - [http://www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/families/limit\\_sometimes\\_foods](http://www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/families/limit_sometimes_foods)