Eating Well with School Age Children
 Everyone has a Job to do

Eating well goes beyond what type of foods we eat. It includes enjoying and feeling good about eating and food. Children who eat well: get enough wholesome enjoyable food to eat, enjoy many foods, try new foods and politely turn down other foods.

It is important that adults and children do their own jobs when it comes to eating.

Adult’s Job: deciding what foods to offer, when to offer them and where they will be eaten.

How to do an adult’s job well:

- **Provide structure around meals and snacks** - decide on a time (along with three meals, children may need two to three snacks per day depending on activity levels, age and stage of growth), sit down comfortably to eat and avoid eating in front of the TV or in the car.

- **Make eating times pleasant** - talk to each other, don’t scold or fight.

- **Let children eat their way** - fast or slow, much or little, some of everything or 1 or 2 foods. Let them have more of any food from what is offered or let them be done eating, even if they haven’t cleaned their plate.

- **Take the pressure off** of children to eat a certain amount of specific foods- Don't try to persuade, entice, encourage, cheer-lead, bribe or force them to eat anything they don't want to eat.

- **Trust** - that children will eat as much as they need in order to grow in the way that is right for them. If they are not hungry, it is okay if they choose not to eat.

- **Be a good role model** - if you make healthy food choices, children are more likely to make healthy food choices as well.

- **Don’t allow grazing** - children are more likely to arrive hungry and ready to eat at planned meal and snack times if they do not have free access to food or drinks, except water, between times.

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What about after school snacking?

- **Make rules** - e.g. snack right after school and at the table; no munching along with homework or in front of the TV, etc.

- **Involve children** - after children learn to follow the snacking rules, involve them; provide guidance, but let them choose their own snack. Together with children, make a list of snacks from the 4 food groups. Children can tell you which foods they like and adults can make sure that they are nutritious and available.

- **Make the healthy choice the easy choice** - help children make healthy choices by stocking up on healthy foods. If the cupboards are filled with cookies and chips, or if this is all you are offering, it’s easy for children to make these the snack choices instead.

- Try to **prepare healthy snacks in advance whenever possible** - if fresh fruit and vegetables are washed and cut up, children will be more likely to choose them when they are hungry.

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**Child’s Job:** choosing *how much* or even *whether* or not to eat from what is offered.

- When children are allowed to decide whether or not they eat will help them to know their body’s signs of hunger and fullness.

- When children choose the amount of food to eat, they will eat the amount their bodies need to grow healthy and strong. This is why providing regular meals and snacks is important. If children decide that they are not hungry for a meal, then they can be certain that a nutritious snack will be available soon.

- Trusting a child to eat the amount that’s right for them will prevent “food fights” at meal times and allow the whole family to enjoy the eating experience.

**Note:** As children grow older and are provided with the right structure, guidance and skills, they will start to decide more of *what* foods to eat.

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