RAINBOW PLATE
healthy eating made simple

Peel Virtual Professional Learning Day 2026
Nourishing Bodies, Nurturing Connections Through Food

Reflection:
What judgements and assumptions do you hold about food?
What is your image of the child?
How does this impact your expectations about how children will interact with food?

You are providing children with nutritious food, but you are also nurturing their RELATIONSHIP with food.

→ Children eat what they LIKE, and they like what they KNOW. Exposure is key!
→ Children eat when they feel SAFE and COMFORTABLE at the table. The environment during mealtimes is created by the setting, the actions and words of everyone who participates.

How we TALK and TEACH about food is just as important as what we feed children.

Possible challenges with binary "healthy/unhealthy" or "good/bad" language when talking about food:

- Young children can't understand abstract concepts like "health" and are actually less likely to choose foods labelled as "healthy."
- Children can feel bad for wanting and liking foods labelled as "unhealthy."
- Labelling food makes some foods more desirable than others. When foods feel "forbidden," they have more emotional power. Children can become obsessed with them.
- Certain "healthy" foods might be too expensive or not part of cultural norms for families. This can lead to confusion, shame and stigmatizing.
- Health is complex. What's healthy for one person might not be for another.

→ Food Neutrality: Just call it all FOOD. Use actual names (eg. carrots, candy.) Avoid moral & value judgement or labels. There are endless ways to describe food without mentioning health!

Food is much more than nutrition: it is CARE, CONNECTION, STORIES, MEMORIES and a rich vehicle for LEARNING across the curriculum.

- Mealtimes present endless opportunities for learning. Building skills, knowledge, relationships and community.
- Every child has the right to be fed. Honour children's individual preferences and awareness of the signals from their bodies. Avoid using food to manipulate or reward children.
- When adults and children eat together and conversation flows, mealtimes are pleasant for everyone. CONNECTIONS and MEMORIES are made. A sense of BELONGING is fostered.
- Children naturally approach food from a CURIOUS, JOYFUL and SENSORY perspective.
- A meal is art. Consider how you CARE for the food, the setting and each other.
- Food tells stories and connects everything. Use food to spark inquiry, connections and learning.

Some Questions to Consider During Food Experiences and Meals:

- How do we move from a mindset of judgement to one of curiosity?
- What do you notice?
- What words do you use to describe food? Which ones feel neutral and which ones carry judgement?
- What is the story of this food?
- Where did this food come from? How was it produced?
- Who was involved in getting this food here?
- What people or communities are connected to this food?
- What memories does this food evoke for you? For children?
- How can you honour the food stories of children and families in your setting?

Putting it into Practice:
How can your food experiences and meals foster feelings of BELONGING for children and families?
How can you use food to help children respect and feel CONNECTED to the natural world?
How can exploring and sharing food spark JOY?