

COMMUNICATING CHANGE



The purpose of this resource is to support health promoters, educators, coaches and those working with children and young people to manage and communicate food and drink changes in Vic Kids Eat Well in a positive way that supports kids to develop healthy attitudes and behaviors regarding food.

INTRODUCTION

All kids deserve the opportunity for a healthy start.

Vic Kids Eat Well aims to give kids a healthy start by boosting the delicious and nutritious food and drink options available to them at school, outside school hours care (OSHC), sports clubs and community organisations. Vic Kids Eat Well does not target individual choices or eating behaviours. Instead, we work with canteens, schools, OSHC, sport clubs and other community settings to create environments that offer delicious and healthy food and drinks and nurture kids to develop healthy attitudes and behaviours regarding food. In the process of creating these environments, the way we communicate about food and changes we're making to foods and drinks available can influence kids' thoughts, attitudes and behaviours regarding food and eating. It is important that our communications are positive, non-judgemental and non-stigmatising.



Whether your organisation has made some changes already or is planning to make changes, the way you communicate change to your community can make a big difference! Communicating change effectively and in a positive way helps to:

- Foster excitement about the changes being made from kids and the wider community.
- Ensure the changes win long term support.
- Support children and young people to develop positive attitudes and behaviours around food and eating.
 - Having healthy or positive attitudes and behaviours around food involves being able to enjoy a wide variety of foods[^], eat regularly, mindfully and flexibly whilst listening to body cues. It also involves being able to eat socially, without feelings of guilt or shame and without having a preoccupation with calories, ingredients, nutrients or labelling foods as good or bad.¹

[^]A wide variety of foods includes mostly foods from the [five food groups](#), grain (cereal) foods, vegetables, fruit, milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives, and lean meats and poultry, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, legumes and beans; and also including some discretionary foods such as confectionary, chocolate, chips, sugary drinks, fried food and some cakes, biscuits or pastries that are high in sugar, salt and/or saturated fats.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE AND BUILDING SUPPORT

Most kids, parents and members of the wider community support changes being made in canteens, kiosks and other food environments in order to provide kids with healthier food and drink options. In fact, Vic Kids Eat Well has generated lots of enthusiasm for new, fresh and nutritious foods and drinks at schools, sports clubs, OSHC and community settings throughout Victoria. See Vic Kids Eat Well [case studies](#) for more.

Building support and enthusiasm for changes to food and drink options requires positive and supportive communication. Below are strategies to help you communicate change, speak about food in positive ways and harness support from your community.



WHAT TO DO

- Role model positive language by speaking positively about food and the changes occurring. This can be verbally or in written communications such as newsletters, notice boards, or social media. See examples:

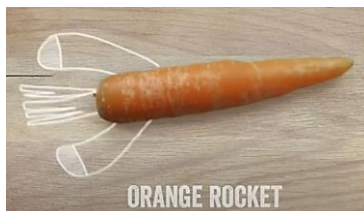
“Try our colourful and delicious new lunch deal xxx”
notice board

“There are some really fresh and tasty new lunch options in the canteen aren’t there?”

Teacher to students

“We’re creating a new fundraising initiative to celebrate our fresh locally grown produce” (e.g. a mango drive)
School or sports club

- With children 12 years or older², if you are talking about health benefits of foods, focus on non-weight related benefits such as mental health, having energy, strong bones and teeth, vision, growth and development. This could be within health or nutrition lessons in secondary school or how foods are spoken about at other settings such as sports clubs.



- Describe foods.
 - Give meals [descriptive and engaging names](#) to help boost appeal. For example, “*hot and creamy pumpkin soup*” or “*zesty summer salad roll*”.
 - See the [Delhaize vegetable name change video](#) for an example of how a supermarket in Belgium used fun names to engage kids and boost vegetable sales.
 - Ensure children also learn foods’ actual names to broaden their knowledge of foods.



WHAT TO DO

- Link to curriculum or other activities, for schools and OSHC.
 - Highlight new foods in the canteen in curriculum activities, such as learning about a particular vegetable in a new menu item, growing and harvesting foods in the kitchen garden, cooking activities or reading books about nutritious foods.
 - In secondary school, new foods in the canteen can be incorporated into nutrition lessons in health and physical education classes or in cooking activities in food technology or home economic classes.
 - Students can help choose ingredients of new menu items, create posters to advertise new items or hold a competition for students to name new menu items.



- Talk about the positive or sensory elements of foods and encourage kids to use their senses to explore foods.
 - In lessons you can also teach students about the different sensory elements of food (primary schools or OSHC).

“We are going to include some orange foods in our afternoon tea, can you describe what carrots or oranges look, feel, taste, smell like?”

WHAT TO AVOID

- Avoid talking about food in relation to disease or obesity risk or referring to foods as “good or bad,” “fattening” or overemphasis on “healthy vs unhealthy”, as it can create a sense of guilt or shame when the “bad” or “unhealthy” foods are eaten.
 - For example, avoid statements such as “we are having carrots instead of chips because carrots are healthy and chips are bad for you.”
 - Instead, you could say “to boost fresh and delicious veggie options, we’re adding carrot and hummus to the menu”. You can focus on the positive and not mention what you are removing, or if asked about removing you could say “We are swapping chips for carrots and hummus so we can boost fresh and delicious veggie options on the menu/in the canteen etc.”
- Avoid talking about body weight, size, shape or dieting/diets. This is harmful as it reinforces weight stigma and can promote negative body image and restrictive eating.
- For school canteens, avoid ‘GREEN’, ‘AMBER’ or ‘RED’ labelling to kids, or in the canteen display. The traffic light system used in the *Canteens, Healthy Eating and Other Food Services Policy* is intended for canteen menu planning and is not to be displayed to kids. Displaying ‘GREEN’, ‘AMBER’ or ‘RED’ places the responsibility of choice on kids and can create guilt or shame if an ‘AMBER’ or ‘RED’ food is eaten.



STRATEGIES TO MANAGE RESISTANCE

Positive changes are generally welcomed by kids, parents and the wider community, but sometimes people can be hesitant about change and you may then encounter some resistance or pushback. Below are strategies to help manage resistance.

- Take a gradual approach rather than all-at-once. Make changes slowly to allow kids to learn to love new options. Some small changes can also be made without making a fuss. Kids don't need to be informed of every change.
 - For example, adding a vegetable to a sandwich, roll or pizza to boost veggies and salads, reducing the amount of sugar or portion size of cakes and muffins or swapping the cooking method to baking or steaming to reduce fried foods.
- Focus on what you are adding rather than what is being removed or reduced. For example:



“We are adding new menu items so that kids have lots of nourishing options to help them learn and play at their best”

- rather than “we’re removing fried foods from the menu”.



- Involve kids or the community where relevant to make it fun and self-directed. For example, create a survey to ask what new items they would like added or provide samples for kids to try before adding to the menu.
- Communicate regularly, especially with families to ensure they are updated on the big changes, such as new menu items. This can help increase kids' buy-in if parents can provide positive reinforcement for the change.
- Use the **4 Ps of marketing**; Product, Place, Price and Promotion, to ensure new products are advertised and promoted for success.

Vic Kids Eat Well is helping schools, outside school hours care, sports clubs and other community organisations to provide healthier food and drink options to kids and does not target children and young people's eating behaviours or individual choices directly. For more information or support for eating disorders and body image issues, see the **Butterfly Foundation**. The Butterfly Foundation offers information, resources, training and events as well as school and community-based prevention programs.

References

1. Having a healthy approach to eating. How far is too far – Eating Disorders Victoria. Accessed May 2023 from <https://www.howfaristoo far.org.au/having-a-healthy-relationship-with-food-and-your-body/having-a-healthy-approach-to-eating/>
2. Orr, G; Kelly, T; Taylor-Beck, T; Rossiter, S; Badloe, N; Kostouros, A; Bast, A; Brassington, L; Willer, F. (2023). Towards Size Inclusive Health Promotion. Better Health Network. Melbourne. Accessed June 2023 from: https://bhn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Final-Online-Version_Size-Inclusive-Resource-1.pdf

