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RAINBOW PLATE  
healthy eating made simple

# Love Your Lunch

A Resource for Parents and Caregivers to Help End  
Lunchbox Shaming in School.



September 19, 2025 is Love Your Lunch Day. You can participate by talking to your child about the importance of lunch inclusivity and acceptance in the classroom. This resource includes conversation starters and activities to help.



## The Situation:

Lunchbox shaming occurs when children are ridiculed or bullied for the contents of their home-packed lunches. Children often get comments like “yuck!” or “that’s gross!” from their classmates when they bring foods with unfamiliar appearances or strong smells.

Sistema’s recent survey found that more than one in four (26%) Canadian parents say that their child has experienced this in elementary school. Some groups reported higher rates of lunchbox bullying, with 40% of new Canadians reporting their children experiencing it. This issue disproportionately affects children and families from Black, Southeast Asian, Latin American and South Asian communities, who were twice as likely to say that their child has experienced lunchbox shaming than White parents.



## Why it’s Important:

Kids need fuel to function and learn, so it’s essential they eat what they bring. Their lunch experience impacts their overall sense of well-being at school, nourishing them beyond just providing nutrients:

- It helps them feel comfortable at school
- It helps promote feelings of belonging and social identity
- It helps them develop social relationships and connect with their peers, teachers and family members

Lunch shaming negatively impacts children by causing feelings of shame and inferiority, social withdrawal, decreased self-esteem and increased stress. Skipping lunch or eating less food leaves kids hungry, making it harder for them to learn and participate in school activities.

## What’s Behind It:

That lunchbox you send to school with your child holds more than food. It’s how you show your care and support. A packed lunch is a meal, but it’s also a little slice of home that you pack and send to school with your child. The rainbow of colours, flavours, textures, shapes and smells that fill a classroom’s lunchboxes reflects the rich diversity within the school community. The lunches you pack reflect your unique culinary traditions, family situation and heritage. It’s your job to decide what’s right for your child to eat. This should be valued and respected at school.

## Be Clear About Roles:

The teacher will help set the structure around lunchtime. They determine when and where kids eat and how much time is allotted for lunch. They also help set the eating atmosphere in the lunchroom.

As a parent, you decide what food you provide in your child’s lunch. You need to respect safety rules and food allergy issues, but other than that you should feel comfortable sending what makes sense for you and your child.

Part 1



# How You Can Make a Difference:

## Things to Consider

- Send food that your child loves to eat!
- Send enough food to meet your child's needs for the day
- Keep things simple. Make sure that your child can easily open and manage all the containers and foods in their lunchbox

Your child's role is to eat. They should decide whether they eat, how much and in what order they eat the foods in their lunch. Children will eat when they feel safe and comfortable.

## Help Create the Culture:

Set the expectation that ALL food is good food. Let your child know that this applies everywhere - at home and in their classroom. Discuss how there are many different foods in the world and that all children should feel comfortable eating the foods they bring from home. Talk to your child about respectful and acceptable language and behaviour around food. Help them understand that bullying and shaming will not be tolerated.

Some ideas for talking about this with your child:

"Foods from around the world look different and have their own smells and flavours because they use different spices and ingredients. That's something to celebrate! It's like learning about new places and people through what they eat."

"When we see or smell something different, it's ok to be curious and ask questions, but we should always do it in a kind way. Saying something like 'that looks interesting, can you tell me more about it?' is a great way to learn and show respect."

"How would you feel if someone made a mean comment about your favourite food? It's important to remember that everyone's food is special to them, and we should always speak kindly about it."

## Lead by Example: Be a role model through your words and actions around food

- Don't use judgmental language or value-based labels to talk about foods or group them—e.g., "good/bad," "healthy/unhealthy," "everyday/sometimes"
- Instead of using words like "treat" "healthy" or "junk food," just call all foods by their actual names (carrots, chips, cookies, curry)
- Make your favourite cultural foods and talk about why you love them
- Use descriptive words to talk about how food looks, smells, sounds and tastes
- Model curiosity when talking about diverse foods

# Tips for Ending Lunchbox Shaming



## Recognize It:

**Reluctance to Eat at School:** Your child may bring home a full or partially uneaten lunch in their lunchbox. They may suddenly not want to eat lunch at school or ask for a different type of lunch than usual.

**Changes in Mood:** Noticeable changes in your child's mood, especially after school.

**Unexplained Changes in Appetite:** Your child might come home hungry even though they should have eaten lunch at school.

**Vague Complaints About School:** Listen for comments like "I don't like lunchtime" or "Kids are mean at lunch."

## Respond:

**Start a Gentle Conversation:** Ask open-ended questions about their day, such as, "How was lunch today?" or "Did anything interesting happen during lunch?" This can encourage your child to share their experiences without feeling pressured.

**Validate Their Feelings:** If your child shares an upsetting experience, validate their feelings by saying things like, "That sounds hard," or "I'm sorry that happened to you."

**Explain What Lunch Shaming Is:** It's important that your child understands that lunch shaming is wrong. Explain that everyone deserves to eat without feeling bad about it, and it's not their fault if they experience this.

**Practice Responses:** Role-play scenarios where someone might comment on their lunch. Practicing how to respond can help your child feel more confident. They might say something like, "Everyone eats different things, and that's okay," or "Did you know that more people in the world eat like me than eat like you?"

**Encourage Open Communication:** Let your child know they can always talk to you if they feel uncomfortable or upset about anything that happens at school.

**Involve the School:** If your child is experiencing lunch shaming, talk to your child's teacher or school counsellor if necessary.

**Lead The Change:** Love Your Lunch Day is September 19, 2025! Join the movement to promote lunch inclusivity by celebrating this day with your family. We're making it easy by providing ideas and activities to help spark conversation and fuel positive change with your children.

# Love Your Lunch Activities

## Love Your Lunch Activities for Families

**Teach and Model Empathy:** Discuss why being kind and understanding towards others matters, especially towards those who might be different. This helps children prevent and handle lunch shaming and other forms of bullying. Be aware of your language and behaviour when you encounter and talk about people and situations that are different from your family.

**Lean into the Love:** Spend time talking with your children about your family's cultural foods. Focus on everyone's favourite foods and help your children find words to express what they love about them. This might involve describing colours, shapes, textures, flavours and fragrances. It also might mean sharing connections between those foods and certain people, feelings, memories or events.

**Cook Your Culture:** Choose a traditional dish from your family's culture and cook it together. Talk about the history, significance and ingredients while you cook it. Share your memories of eating this food when you were younger. Younger children can help with simple tasks like washing vegetables, stirring or setting the table, while older children can do more complex cooking tasks and even research the history of the dish.

**Lunchbox Storytelling:** Pack a lunch that reflects your cultural heritage and encourage your child to share the story behind the meal with their classmates. This helps your child to see their lunch as something special and unique. Younger children can explain their lunch by saying: "This is called [food name], and we eat it because [brief reason]." Older children can create a simple presentation about their cultural foods, including visuals or interesting facts.

**Involve Your Child:** Children are more likely to eat lunches they help pack. Knowing what to expect when they open their lunchbox helps your child feel more comfortable. Ask your child what they want to bring for lunch and invite them to help prepare and pack the food in their lunchbox. You can choose the assortment of foods available, but let your child decide what and how much they want to bring from that selection. It's ok to include a conversation about not wasting food as you do this.



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## Love Your Lunch Activities for Families

**Show and Tell at School:** Invite your child to bring a small, non-perishable item related to their culture's food (e.g., packaged food, spice, or dried food) to show their class and explain what it's used for and why they love it. If possible, children can bring samples to share so other children can smell, feel, and taste the food item. If it's possible, drop into your child's class and be part of the presentation!

**Reacting to Unfamiliar Foods:** Help your child learn to respond to unfamiliar foods in a respectful and open-minded way. For example:

*"When you see or smell something new in a friend's lunch, it's okay to be curious!  
Every family has special foods, and sometimes they might look or smell different from what we're used to. Let's use positive and curious language."*

### Instead Of:

Ew, what's that?

That smells gross!

Your lunch looks weird.

### Try:

That looks interesting! What is it?

*That smells different from what I usually eat.*

*What does it taste like?*

*I've never seen a lunch like that before. Can you tell me about it?*

*This resource has been co-created by [Sistema](#) and [Rainbow Plate](#).*

## About Love Your Lunch Day

To tackle the issue of lunchbox bullying, Sistema has launched the Love Your Lunch Day with the goal of starting a conversation about food diversity and creating a more inclusive school environment where all types of lunches are accepted. Canadians are urged to participate in Love Your Lunch Day by talking to their kids and students about the importance of lunch inclusivity and acceptance. To sign up for updates, visit [www.LoveYourLunchDay.ca](http://www.LoveYourLunchDay.ca).

