

Lunchtime Expectations

Ripponlea Primary School Families



About Lunchtime Expectations

Across November and December 2025, Better Health Network Health Promotion team partnered with Ripponlea Primary School teachers, families and students to understand the eating opportunities, food learning and body/body image learning within the school. These learnings led to the development of Food Environment Value Statements that will support lunchtimes and positive body image at Ripponlea Primary School.

The Food Environment Value Statements within this document were co-designed with **teachers** (100%), **families** (40%) and **students** (35 students across Foundation to Grade 6). These values and practice guidance consider the broader context that Ripponlea Primary School exists in, the schools' strengths, and the limitations of the school environment.

Background

School settings play a critical role in shaping how children perceive and speak about their bodies, through lunchtime rituals, classroom learning, and staffroom conversations. Teacher attitudes & language, curriculum content, peer relationships, and school culture can either reinforce appearance-based norms or act as protective factors (Tylka & Piran, 2019). In the early years of a child's life, research highlights that:

- Up to 68% of primary school-age children have reported appearance-related teasing from peers (Damiano et al. 2018).
- At age 5, 90% of boys and 92% of girls have indicated a preference for not inviting children in a larger body to their birthday party, and perceiving thin-to-average sized children as 'good' (EMBodIED Research, La Trobe University).
- The more children are surrounded by negative weight talk, the more likely they are to internalise negative weight-based stereotypes to judge themselves, which also leads to self-devaluation (Rancano et al. (2021).

Ripponlea Primary School Food Environment Goal

To foster a safe, inclusive, and positive food environment that respects diversity, models' neutral language and supports the wellbeing of every student.

Please note: This document captures the Food Environment Value Statements developed by Ripponlea Primary School and how they can be practiced at home. You know your child best so **please be guided by them and what works for your family.**

Practicing Our Values at Home

Respectful Routines

- Create consistent eating routines each day
- Role model calm, positive mealtime behavior
- Focus on connection and conversation, not what or how much they eat
 - Use neutral, non-judgmental language around food and bodies



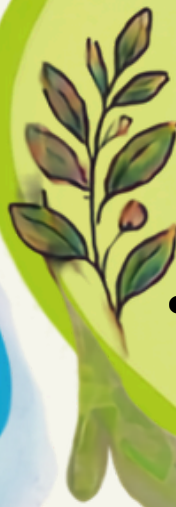
Structure & Trust

- You decide what, when and where to serve food
- Trust your child to decide if and how much they eat
 - No pressure, coercion or bribery - intake varies day to day
 - Involve children in choosing and packing their lunchbox



Food Learning & Diversity

- Describe food using the five senses, not healthy/unhealthy labels
- Explore where food comes from together - gardening, cooking, shopping
- Use body-neutral language and discourage body comparison
- Seek support early if you notice concerns around food or body image



You know your child best - be guided by them

Value Statement

Respectful Lunchtime Routine at home



Respectful Lunchtime Routine

Ripponlea Primary School is committed to calm and predictable eating breaks that promote connection and mutual respect. Our practices support inclusive attitudes toward all foods and bodies, ensuring language and expectations reflect the diversity of our community.

This can be practiced at home through:

- Families are encouraged to create **consistent eating routines each day** where possible. Gentle cues such as music, a timer, or a reminder can help children transition calmly to and from meals.
- Acknowledging and **accommodating to your child's sensory needs** during the mealtime and seeking support to develop an approach that works for your family.
- Adults **role model** manners, calm voices and attentive behaviour during mealtimes to invite children to practice this. This might look like taking turns in sharing stories about the day, using appropriate eating utensils, having a 'no thank you plate' so there is a place to put food that is tried and not eaten (may help to remove the spitting out of foods).
- Encourage children to take pride in caring for **shared mealtime spaces** at home. This may include helping to wipe the table, take dirty dishes to the sink, pack away lunchboxes, sort recycling, compost food scraps, or place rubbish in the correct bins. Acknowledging children's efforts can help build responsibility and confidence.
- Adults use **neutral, non-judgmental language** around food and bodies avoiding labelling foods as "healthy", "everyday", "unhealthy" or "sometimes,". A simple "here is dinner, we have some sausages, potato, beans and fruit".
- Mealtime **connection** and conversation. Families are encouraged to focus on sharing stories, discussing the day, or talking about upcoming activities, rather than commenting on what or how much children are eating. Reinforce skills such as waiting their turn, not interrupting, and engaging in calm conversation (e.g. rotate telling a joke, others listen while joke is told).
- It is ok to mix things up! A loungeroom picnic, eating outside, eating in front of the TV for a movie night on the weekend. Predictability is great, yet novelty in experiences is also something that can support regulation during mealtimes.

Value Statement

Structure and Timing at home



Structure and Timing

Ripponlea Primary School ensures students have protected and predictable eating times by implementing a consistent whole-school structure that provides adequate time to eat, along with flexible options for finishing food when needed.

This can be practiced at home through:

- Recognising that every child has **different needs** and mealtime routines may look different for some children. Some children may require flexible access to food or water throughout the day, particularly to support sensory, medical, or regulation needs.
- Children will be **trusted** to eat their food free from pressure, coercion or bribery.
- Using Ellyn Satter’s **Division of Responsibility** to foster predictable roles around food and eating. For children in the primary school years, the parent/carer is responsible for **what** food is provided, **when** the food is provided and **where** the food is provided. Children decide **if they want to eat**, **how much** they want to eat, and in **what order** they want to eat. As children develop and learn the skills to put together a diverse snack-meal or main meal, they will gradually take responsibility for when, where, and what they will eat. Children will become more attune to their hunger cues though guidance, skill building, and role modelling.
- Children and adolescence will sometimes eat what seems like a lot, and some times will eat what seems like very little. We can expect to see **intake vary** day to day, week to week, yet remaining free from pressure, prompting and bribing is essential. Children will learn to trust their hunger and ‘had-enough’ cues, when invited to tune into this.
- Packing **school lunchboxes** that include foods that your child is familiar with and enjoys eating. Food that they can eat easily (e.g open the packets), in the allocated time they have. This may look like chopping up an apple in the earlier years so they can eat pieces easily, small snacks like pretzels or sultanas, items that are nonperishable.
- Packing lunchboxes that **children are involved in**, selecting items that they will look forward to eating and develop the skills in packing a diverse lunchbox.
- Keeping lunchboxes **simple**. Sometimes fewer options and decisions work best for younger children or children with feeding or sensory differences.
- **Avoid checking, monitoring or questioning food** that has/has not been eaten while at school. Instead, aim to check the lunchbox out of eyeline of your child, observe over time how frequently this happens, then discuss neutrally and non-judgmentally with your child.

Sample script:

“I am wondering if there are particular foods you would love to have in your lunchbox?”

“Can I help in some way to make eating your lunch while at school easier?”

“I notice you have some food left in your lunchbox, should I pack less tomorrow or would you like to finish it now?”

Value Statement

Food Learning and Diversity at home



Food Learning and Diversity

Ripponlea Primary School is committed to a learning environment where conversations about food and bodies are safe, respectful, and celebrate the diversity of our community. We support teachers to build confidence in these areas and ensure students receive inclusive, evidence-informed learning that broadens their understanding of health and fosters positive body image.

This can be practiced at home through:

- Supporting positive body image at home by using **respectful, inclusive, and body-neutral** language. Children benefit from hearing adults speak kindly about their own bodies and the bodies of others.
- When talking about food with young children, focus on:
 - Using the **five senses** when talking about and discussing food e.g. “Bananas are yellow”, “Crackers and carrots are crunchy”.
 - Avoid labelling foods as “healthy” or ‘unhealthy’, ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘sometimes’ or ‘always’ foods. Children within this age group are egocentric thinkers and these labels can create confusing categories. Instead, label food what it is e.g. berries, chocolate, bread, lolly etc.
 - Talk with children about where food comes from, how it grows, and how it is prepared. Gardening, cooking, shopping, and exploring different cultural foods can all support positive food learning experiences, all free from moralising food as good or bad.
- Older children and into pre-adolescence, can learn more about food groups, to help with **food literacy** and bringing together a filling and nourishing meal. These learnings should remain free from narratives about foods value or nutrient content.
- Encourage children to **respect that everyone eats differently**. If children make comments about another person’s food, gentle reminders such as “everyone enjoys different foods” or “let’s not yuck someone else’s yum” can help promote respect and acceptance.
- Respectful and **neutral language is used if talking about bodies**. Talk about what bodies can do rather than what they look like e.g. “our legs help us to climb the ladder”, “our hands can grasp things”.
- Try to **discourage appearance-based comparisons** or comments about body size, whether positive or negative. Aim to not comment on your own body’s appearance around children/young people. Children and young people benefit from learning that bodies naturally come in many different shapes and sizes. Positive compliments about appearance can reinforce the desirability of smaller body size.

(continued)

Value Statement

Food Learning and Diversity at home



Food Learning and Diversity

- If a child makes comments such as “I’m fat” or **comments on another person’s body**, respond calmly and without judgement. You can ask your young person gentle questions to understand what they mean, listen without interrupting, talk about body diversity and how all bodies are different and reinforce that having body fat is a normal and important part of being human ([see sample script below](#)).
- Help children develop a **broad understanding of health and wellbeing**. Families can emphasise that feeling healthy is different from person to person and not an isolated state of being. It includes:
 - Eating a variety of foods.
 - Drinking water.
 - Getting enough sleep and rest.
 - Moving and playing.
 - Spending time with family and friends.
 - Feeling safe, connected, and happy.
- Aim to **identify concerns around food** or bodies early to seek family support. This might look like your young person has an increase in physical activity or monitoring of movement, appearance based ideals, has a narrowing diet or a preoccupation in food preparation and what foods are included, or commentary around their body’s size/changes ([see Nourish, Nurture, Notice and Butterfly Foundation support linked in resources](#)).
- Review the **home environment** around your young person, promoting diversity through imagery, language and representation in books and movies. Representation of all foods, bodies, cultural backgrounds, body shapes, sizes, cultural backgrounds and abilities helps to support acceptance and normalisation of diversity.

Sample script:

Young person: “How do you think this outfit looks?” or “I’m too XYZ for this outfit”

Reply: “How do you feel in the outfit?”, “If it works for you, it works for you”

Young person: “[person] looks so fat/thin in that”

Reply: “Remember we don’t comment on peoples bodies, all bodies are so different. You can always talk to me if you have questions or worries though”

Young person: “I’m so fat”

Reply: “What makes you say that?”, “It can feel tricky/awkward/uncomfortable when bodies change and grow”, “Everybody has fat on their body, and bodies come in different shapes and sizes. Bodies are meant to be different.”

Young person: “I can’t eat that, it has so much sugar in it”

Reply: “What made you think that?” “Are you worried about how the food affects your body?”

Then redirect toward body trust: “Our bodies are really clever. They use carbohydrates, including sugar, for energy.” “We don’t need to be scared of foods.”

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Further Information

Please see the below links to information and resources:

- [Embrace Collective: Families](#)
- [Children’s Thinking about Food and Eating - A Piagetian-Based Study](#)
- [How Infants and Young Children Learn About Food: A Systematic Review](#)
- [No Pressure Lunchbox](#)
- [Lunchbox Ideas: Build a Lunch](#)
- [Ellyn Satter’s Division of Responsibility](#)
- [Eating Disorder Families, Nourish Nurture Notice](#)
- [Butterfly Foundation](#)

References

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