

Setting the Table for a Healthy Food Conversation

Tips for care providers working within Aboriginal Communities

Creating a positive dialogue around food and nutrition

At Island Health, we strive to create care and work environments that are culturally safe for Aboriginal clients and coworkers.

The information here was designed in collaboration with members of the local Aboriginal community to help support culturally safe conversations around food and nutrition.

It is important to note that cultural safety is a journey and a process of discovering what rings true for each individual. We invite you to review this material and create a dialogue with your clients to find out what knowledge and experiences they bring to the table when it comes to food and nutrition.

Here are some things to consider when providing nutrition education:

- Ask for permission to do a talk about food and nutrition and to give advice.
- Ask about their food skills if they do any food harvesting, processing or gathering or cooking. Find their strengths and assets.
- Leave the 'nutrition guidelines' at the door and find out *what* and *where* the person likes to cook and eat.



“Setting the Table – eating and connecting

- Explore food education in a positive light. Encourage more of the healing foods they like to eat even if it is not nutritionally balanced yet. Work on balance over time while building relationships.
- Ask if there are foods or fluids they don't like to eat or be served?
- Are they able to access and eat any traditional foods?
- In response to common dietary deficiencies, explore traditional food recommendations and foods they like that could help.

Reflecting on the Past to Understand the Present

Certain foods have the power to bring back memories — good and bad. Here are some historical notes to consider

Food in Residential Schools—

(Read Mosby Report to learn more)

- Nothing like the food from their home community
- Food provided was poor quality, and lacked nutrients and flavour - it was often bland, cold, small portions, and under or overcooked
- Food was used as punishment, force feeding, threats, clean your plate
- Many schools used their students as food and nutrition experiments

Colonizers brought in white foods: flour, sugar, salt, lard and alcohol. People were encourage to eat it. ie 'White bread was considered to be of high class.'

Working in Community – what you might see?

- People are polite and may not state they dislike certain foods. They will just push them aside or cover uneaten parts with napkins
- Food security and hunger is a reality, people may eat larger portions as they have experienced periods of time when food was scarce. Many parents skip meals to ensure their children have food
- It is important to always serve enough food as some people take seconds or extra plates home for themselves or others. It is tradition to always ensure guests leave fed and cared for
- People show love through food, even unhealthy foods. Many grew up with the 'clean your plate' messaging
- The gathering space comes alive when traditional foods are served It is viewed as filling the spirit.
- Some people are disconnected from the foods from the ocean/forests and the food teachings. This comes with great loss.



Smoke house on We Wai Kai Nation Quadra Island at Traditional Foods Conference 2010.

Setting the Table with Local Food Traditions

- Vast food knowledge and expertise exists in First Nation communities.
- Food technologies have been practiced for thousands of years
- An intimate connection was created through years of watching and experimenting with the food, land and animals
- Each community member had a role and skills. These were then passed on to the next generation by oral and practical mentoring.

“When the tide is out, the table is set.”



Being Culturally Safe is a Process and a Personal Journey

- ◆ Take time to explore an individual's food likes and dislikes. You may be surprised at what people avoid. It's important not to make assumptions about any of food preferences.
- ◆ Get to know the person before diving into food questions. Some people might not like too many questions.
- ◆ For some people, certain foods may trigger mental and physical stress.
- ◆ Explore foods they do like to eat. Don't judge. Remember the historical context and food security issues.
- ◆ Many people are silent and don't share the trauma experienced around food offered in residential schools or tactics used historically.
- ◆ Respect the knowledge of someone's own life and decisions.
- ◆ Consider historical impacts that may have caused emotional eating issues (such as binge eating, love through food, food avoidance and rushing to eat fearing scarcity of food).

Foods people may avoid (individual preferences)

- ◆ Vegetables, milk products, cereals, oatmeal, beans, flour, rice, sugar, bread, salt, coffee, tea, dry toast, supplements and pills—ask about others?



Tips for meal planning

- ◆ Serve a variety of options.
- ◆ Invite the Elders to eat first or serve them. Find out what the traditions are in your area.
- ◆ Offering to bring an Elder coffee, tea, water when they arrive is respectful.
- ◆ Connect with community health leaders and cooks to find more information on what to serve and menu planning.
- ◆ Set the table with nourishing foods that some families don't get enough of (such as protein, fruits and vegetables).
- ◆ Encourage youth involvement in serving of meals. Train them to learn what is on the menu and ask elders if they would like to be served asking them individually what they would like to eat, from what is available at the meal. Many elders will choose to serve themselves.
- ◆ Create time for people to connect with one another over food.

"Our food is our medicine"



Foods from this territory

Foods from the Water

- Fish (salmon, trout, ling cod, and oolichans), fish roe (salmon, herring)
- Sea foods (octopus, sea urchins, rock stickers, gooseneck barnacles, seaweed, sea asparagus)
- Shellfish: clams, mussels, oysters, crab, prawns
- Sea mammals (whale and seal)

Foods from the Land

- Large animals: elk, deer, moose, sheep, caribou, bear
- Small animals: beaver, squirrel, rabbit, birds and eggs, grouse, duck

Plants from Above the Ground

Berries, flowers, tree bark, inner cambian, sap, leaves, lichen, plums and crab apples, spruce tips, shoots, greens, plants, nuts, seeds, mushrooms

Plants from Below the Ground

Roots: camus, spring beauty, bitter root, wapato, chocolate lily, other underground parts

Food for thought: What traditional foods from this list are still available?



Salmon ready to be BBQ around a fire at a feast at SNIDCEL (Todd Inlet).

First Nations Food and Nutrition Environment Scan 2009

- 40% worry that food will **run out**
- 91% would like to **eat more** traditional foods
- 36% said food bought **didn't last** and they had **no money** to buy more
- 12% cut the size of meals or **skipped meals**
- 7% were hungry but did not eat because they **couldn't afford enough food**

Top 5 barriers that prevented people from using more traditional foods

- Lack of equipment or transportation
- Lack of availability
- Lack of time
- Difficult to access
- Government/firearms certification and regulations

Support for Greater Learning

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Island Health Cultural Safety Facilitators

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"The ocean is my refrigerator, the forest is my garden."

