CELEBRATE Feeding: A responsive approach to food and feeding in early learning settings

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Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research https://dcjournal.ca/doi/full/10.3148/

Background

Early learning and child care (ELCC) settings in Canada follow nutrition standards that outline food provisions, with many also encouraging responsive feeding practices that help to create a supportive environment for children.

While there is a current emphasis on responsivity in relation to ELCC, caregivers who lack confidence in children's ability to regulate their own intake, or those who feel stressed about mealtime, may unknowingly engage in less responsive feeding practices.

CELEBRATE Feeding: A Responsive Feeding Approach

The CELEBRATE Feeding Approach is a theory-driven, flexible framework that builds on previous definitions and concepts of responsive feeding by highlighting the importance of language, play, diversity, inclusion, and the celebration of food and feeding.

It was developed through an iterative process involving a literature review, a scoping review, and a consensus-building process with advisory committee members.

This led to 13 target educator behaviours categorized into language, mealtime, and play, emphasizing the interconnectedness and situational context of these behaviours.

Implementing these behaviours individually improves the responsiveness of the feeding environment, with a compounding effect when multiple behaviours are practiced.

Talk about food using neutral language.

Communicate with children about when food is offered and when it will be offered again.

Limit pressure on children to eat.

CELEBRATE Language

Talk about different cultures, food practices, preferences, and allergies.

Have positive conversations at mealtime that are not about food.

Limit the use of food as a reward.

Establish consistent and responsive feeding routines.

Support children to decide what and how much to eat from the foods offered.

CELEBRATE Mealtime

Encourage children to serve themselves.

Sit with children and eat the same food.

Provide repeated opportunities to explore new foods and textures.

Limit rewarding children for eating*

CELEBRATE Play

Facilitate play related to food, cooking and mealtime.

*Unless specified within a child's developmental plan.



Children gain eating competence and have a positive relationship with food.

Children accept a wide variety of foods and textures. Children practice self-regulation and tune into hunger and fullness cues.

The CELEBRATE Feeding Approach to Responsive Feeding

Relevance to Practice

Dietitians play a crucial role in bridging the gap between documented responsive feeding practices and their day-to-day implementation in ELCC settings.

Using the CELEBRATE Feeding Approach, dietitians can support early childhood educators by advocating for varied food exposure in a supportive and pressure-free environment.

This approach fosters a respectful, collaborative feeding connection that aligns with children's hunger and satiety cues, promoting their **confidence**, **self-regulation**, and **healthy development**, ultimately building a foundation for a positive lifelong relationship with food.









