

## BEING A HEALTHY EATING ROLE MODEL

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Children watch and imitate adults, and look to them to learn proper behavior. Just as children pick up positive habits – saying please and thank you - they can also pick up attitudes about food.

As role models, adults need to monitor their own behavior so that their children acquire healthy attitudes toward eating.

**CHILDREN LEARN BY EXAMPLE** ~ think about the eating behaviors at your school.

- 1) Are desserts and snacks in your faculty room every day? Are you eating them?
- 2) Do you or other teachers often skip breakfast?
- 3) Is soda easier to find than milk or 100% juice at the school?
- 4) Do the teachers diet (or discuss dieting) all of the time?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, your school may be sending unhealthy messages about food to your students.

Establishing healthy habits can be very difficult for children who receive mixed messages. They will not perceive healthy eating as important if it is not something that they see adults doing.

Positive and negative comments influence children’s attitudes about foods. Children will remember remarks about guilt associated with eating certain foods. Likewise, if you are eating poorly children may notice it. What you do matters as much as what you say.

Modeling healthy eating supports the development of healthy behaviors in children - and there is no stronger message for the importance of healthy habits. For example, research shows that young girls are more likely to drink milk if their moms drink milk – milk contains calcium, an important nutrient for bone growth and development.

### TIPS FOR TEACHERS ~

Actions speak louder than words, so it is unlikely that words will have much impact on children’s eating habits unless you practice what you preach.

You can model good behavior by eating well, exhibiting healthy attitudes toward food, displaying a good body image and leading an active lifestyle.

While it is unrealistic to expect anyone to be a perfect role model, trying your best to demonstrate good eating habits will positively influence children. *“Do as I say and not as I do”* simply does not work. Eating a variety of foods will teach children healthy eating habits that they can follow for the rest of their lives. And it is likely to improve your health as well.