

Whole Health Mindful Meal Placemats



These placemats were created to encourage kids to slow down and pay attention to the food they eat. They are a great tool that can be used as a conversation starter at school snack times and lunch hours. Eating healthy local food is important but we also need to connect kids to their food by taking time to understand how food supports both our bodies and our minds. It is important to slow down when we eat, practice gratitude and using all of our senses to fully enjoy our food. When we create a healthy relationship with food, we also create a healthy relationship with our families, our communities and Mother Earth.

When children are more mindful of what they eat:

- They make healthier food choices
- They digest their food better
- They waste less food
- They become more interested in helping to cook / prepare meals
- They notice how some foods don't make us feel so good after we eat them. Both physically and mentally (we could have a stomach ache, feel tired or even fidgety)
- They understand that the food they eat can affect their brain, mood and behavior
- They understand that sometimes our thirst is mistaken for hunger
- They understand the importance of supporting local: gardeners/farmers/ bakers
- They understand the importance of healthy soil
- They take time to sit and enjoy their food made with love and share it with family, friends, and community
- We have healthy, thriving, compassionate kids that want to make a difference to help make a cleaner earth



Mindful Meal Placemat Conversations:

Sit at the table

- When we sit down and eat our food at the table our body is able to focus on digesting our food and helping to make sure our body gets all the good nutrients out of our food.
- When we are up moving around our body changes its focus to movement and is less able to support the digestive system. We might not get all the beneficial nutrients out of our food.
- When we sit down we talk and get to know our friends / family sharing experiences, creating community and learn important conversation skills

Slow Down

- Take a moment to slow down and take three deep belly breaths to get your body into rest and digest
- When we slow down we can come into the present moment. Not the past...not the future. Right here...right now
- Allow enough time to eat your food. Whole food requires chewing and chewing takes time
- Slowing down and being present during the meal also lets our brain catch up to our stomach and tell us when we're full

See your food

- What are the colours on your plate?
- Each fruit and vegetable has something special to make us healthy. So eat as many different colours as you can and be sure you are getting all the "good stuff."



- Choose dark **GREEN** leafy veggies for strong bones and healthy eyes, teeth
- Choose **YELLOW** and **ORANGE** fruits and veggies for a strong immune system, eyes and glowing skin & heart.
- Choose **RED** fruits and veggies to protect your heart, blood health and memory.
- Choose **BLUE/PURPLE** fruits and veggies to maintain memory, your urinary system and healthy aging.
- Choose **WHITE/BROWN** fruits and veggies for a healthy heart, reduce cancer and blood pressure

Touch your food

- How does your food feel in your mouth?
- Is it crunchy, creamy, dry, moist, crispy?
- Is it hot or cold?
- Do you like the texture?
- If it is finger food...how does it feel in your fingers?

Taste your food

- What are the flavors you taste in your mouth? Are there many flavors? Do the flavors change?
- **Sweet:** honey, maple syrup, fruits, sweet veggies like carrots
- **Sour:** lemon, lime, vinegar, yogurt
- **Savory (umami):** mushrooms, cured meats, tomatoes, soy sauce
- **Bitter:** dark chocolate, coffee, walnuts and leafy greens
- **Salty:** salt, aged cheese, anchovies, soy sauce



Smell your food

- Does the food you are about to eat make your mouth water? When it was cooking did the smell make your mouth water and maybe your stomach growl?
- Use your hand to waft the smell of your food towards your face and breathe deeply in through your nose. Imagine a hot loaf of cinnamon bread coming out of the oven. Does it make you smile? Does it make you want to eat it?
- Does the smell of your food trigger a memory of your grandma or someone you like to cook with? Maybe a memory of your favorite restaurant or family get together?

Hear your food

- What sound does your food make?
- Carrots and apples make a crunching sound
- Some cheese makes a squeaking sound in your mouth
- Can you hear the sizzle of bacon?
- What about when someone is pouring water into a glass
- Does your popcorn pop?
- What is the sound that pancake batter dropping onto the griddle makes?
- Plug your ears and listen to the sound of chewing, chomping & crunching

Turn off the Devices: TV, games and get off the phone!

- When we are staring at the TV or phone, we are not being mindful of what is going into our mouth or even how fast it is going into our mouth.
- We might eat more than we usually eat...we were not paying attention
- When we are looking at a screen, we miss out on conversations with the people around us and connecting to people by sharing our daily experiences and stories



Where did your food come from?

- When we slow down and connect to our food we are more mindful about where our food comes from.
- Was the lettuce from the store or the garden? Do I know the farmer that grew it? Maybe I grew it with my parents or maybe our class grew it in the school garden.
- Did some of my lunch come from my garden? Did it come from a community share box (CSA)? What is a community share box?
- Did we get it from the grocery store?
- Is the food I am eating in season? What does in season mean?
- Where did the food from the grocery store come from and how far did the food travel to get to the grocery store?
- How was the food transported to the grocery store?
- How does eating our food from local farmers and local gardens (our own garden) help our planet?

Chew your food 30 times each bite

- When we chew our food it helps with our digestion
- Digestion starts in your mouth (with chewing). There are enzymes in our mouth that help to break down our food. If we don't chew our food well then our stomach has to work harder to break down our food.
- Chewing allows your body to extract the greatest possible amount of nutrients from the food you eat.
- If we take bites that are too big or too small we might not be chewing food properly.
- If we don't chew our food well enough before we swallow, we can develop digestive problems, and are also at a greater risk for: choking, malnutrition and dehydration.



Put your fork down between bites

- Putting the fork down between bites forces us to be more conscious of how fast we are eating and take more time to savor the food in our mouth
- When we put our forks down between bites it slows us down and we tend to eat less food and feel more satisfied
- When we chew our food longer we stay full longer and don't need a snack shortly after mealtimes

Eat what you want...just make it yourself

- What is in our food?
- Sometimes we eat food that comes from a package and there are a lot of ingredients. Sometimes the ingredients are unrecognizable and difficult to pronounce
- If you can't pronounce it...consider that maybe it is something you don't want to put in your body?
- When we get in the kitchen and make it ourselves, we know what is in our food and we use whole food ingredients.
- We would not consider using the chemicals in processed foods in our own kitchen

Love yourself

- When we love ourselves we want to take good care of ourselves (eat food that nourishes our body and mind). When we take care of ourselves we are better able to take care of others and mother earth.



Gratitude - give thanks for your food

- This is a simple way to reconnect with where your food comes from. This practice of pausing before your meal to express gratitude also allows for a simple transition from our busy day to become fully present when you are eating.

- Taking time to be grateful allows your nervous system to switch into rest-and-digest mode.

- Trace your food back to the original source and express gratitude for each step of the way:

- The seeds
- The soil
- The clean water
- The weather that provided perfect growing conditions
- The farmers who strategically planned their crop selection
- The workers on the farm who perform physical labor to harvest the crops
- The lives of the animals that were sacrificed for our nourishment
- The truck driver who drove the produce to the store
- The grocery store that stocks our local products so that we can easily swing by on our way home from work to pick up ingredients
- The grocery store clerk who smiles and helps you at check out
- The person who prepared your food with love

There is plenty to be grateful for!

