FIVE WAYS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY EATING

**N - Non-verbal cues**
Non-verbal cues can be communicated through the environment and through your interactions with students.

Environment –
- Decorate the cafeteria in an inviting way.
- Use posters, signs, and decorations that feature fruits, vegetables, and healthy lifestyles.
- Make healthy foods available throughout the day, especially in areas where children are expected to wait for longer periods (e.g., the checkout area).

Interactions –
- Smile and greet the children warmly.
- Make eye contact with the children in your interactions.
- Praise children for choosing a fruit or vegetable.

**U - Understanding Students’ Perspectives**
Children and adolescents see and identify foods very differently. To understand elementary children’s perspectives, lower yourself to their height. What does the environment look like from there? Can you see and identify the foods and the food labels you have placed around? Are students old enough to read the menu? Understanding children’s perspectives can be easy once you get down to it, but thinking of creative solutions might be a bit more difficult. Also, consider the experience of students with special needs such as visual or auditory impairment, limited mobility, etc.

Adolescents are independent and want to make easy choices. Below are some ideas to help target both children and adolescents:

- Place food labels and foods at eye level for the students.
- Make sure foods are easy to eat.
  - Foods that require peeling or are difficult to eat should be pre-cut or prepared in a way so that they are ready to eat as served.
  - Adolescents may prefer items packaged to make them “grab & go.”

State the names of the foods when the children get to that point in the line.
- Some children develop their reading skills later than others.
- With adolescents, they may be preoccupied with socializing and may not take the time to read the labels.

Make it easy for students to tell what type of food it is.
- Place a picture or clip art by the food to help identify the food.
- Name or provide pictures of foods in mixed dishes such as casseroles or soups.

**D - Direct Statements**
Remember, you are a role model. Say things that show children that you believe the foods are both tasty and healthy. Below are some examples of direct statements that can be used:

- “Those __________ are really tasty and good for you. Would you like to try some?”
- “I love __________. Have you tried them? We have some on the menu today.”
- “That’s great you picked so many healthy foods today; you should be proud of yourself.”
- “I noticed that you’ve been picking healthy fruit and vegetable options lately; that’s really great.”
- “Eating those will give you a lot of energy and will help make sure your body gets plenty of the nutrients it needs so you stay healthy.”
- “Would you like to try the __________ instead of the __________ today? It is much healthier for you.”

**G - Gestures**
Gestures can accompany verbal or non-verbal cues to children and adolescents that direct their attention to healthier menu items.

Verbal –
- “Have you seen the __________ we have today? It is really good for you.”
- “Have a look at the menu, we have a healthy fruit and vegetables offered every day.”
- “Over there, we have some other options that are healthier for you.”

Non-verbal –
- Reach for the healthier option first to add to the children’s trays.
- For staff helping move children through the line, get down on their level and point them to the area of the cafeteria where they can find the healthiest options.

**E - Education**
Take opportunities to tell the children how healthy the foods are for them. Here are some good ways to educate children:

- Have everyone sit or gather before lunch is served. Take a few minutes to share the healthy aspects of the foods offered that day.
- Send out a daily list of the lunch foods to the teachers each day. Ask the teachers to share the health benefits of the foods with students before bringing them to the cafeteria.
- Tell students about the health benefits when they are choosing their food options.
- Post the health benefits on or near the cafeteria line. Remember, post the lists in areas of the line where children will be for the longest period (e.g., the beginning of the line and near the register).
- Have one staff member stand at the front of the line and tell children about the foods as they wait.
- Use posters around the cafeteria (in large print) that promote commonly served fruits and vegetables.