Nutrition & Trauma - Considerations for School Communities
Trauma-responsive Practices Related to Food

Food Access & Farm to School

1. Create a share table or cooler in the cafeteria and/or classroom. Put unwanted items in baskets for anyone to take. Teachers can put leftover snacks in backpacks of kids who would benefit from them at home. This helps students manage unwanted food and feel as though it is not being wasted, as well as provides efficient access to snacks for all.

2. Include students in growing & cooking food on a regular basis.
   a. “If I know where it comes from and how it is made, I am much more likely to eat it. I don’t always trust food at new places because I am not sure where it came from.”
   b. “The only way I could learn how to cook is at school. There was usually no food at home and sometimes we lived in a hotel with no kitchen.”

Payment

3. No adult speaks to any student about forms or payment for food.

4. Every student accesses food with no questions asked in public. (Student behaviors & food choices are tracked & needed conversations happen in privacy at another time)

5. Do track & follow up proactively with adults so that a student does not create a huge bill unknowingly.

6. Conversations happen with the student only on aspects they can control. Ask what they need & reassure their needs will be met.

Behavior Management

7. No consequences related to food & no rewards or reinforcements related to food.

8. Allow the student to go to lunch early with a buddy until they learn & master the routine.

9. Help students decide what they will choose from the menu before they go to the cafeteria & write on a sticky note so they don't have to remember when overwhelmed. They can have the note in their pocket just in case they need to remind themselves.

10. Offer students with sensory challenges the option of a table on the periphery that is less crowded.
11. Install visual timers that can be seen from several places in the cafeteria (Timed timers- different from a typical clock. It shows you the time left in red.)

12. Increase the time for transitions so that no winter clothing has to be on during lunch. It is too much to expect developmentally for sensory integration for many students.

13. Provide a basket with a deck of cards, pencil & paper puzzles, coloring, etc. for those who need a way to fill time effectively. These items should be controlled by adults and distributed wisely so that they do not replace eating.

**Norms & Routines**

14. Teach routines in Kindergarten in the classroom by having lunch delivered on a cart daily. Then move the cafeteria in 1st grade.

15. Mark transitions with music- ex. play 2 songs at the end of lunch- the first song is "finish up & put stuff away" & the second song is "stop talking & wait for cue to transition."

16. Tables are dismissed by an adult one at a time to reduce the crowd in the hall.

17. Random prizes given to tables that follow norms.

18. Post the norms visually & have students create those posters.

19. Create a plan for welcoming new students to the school. Over the course of four days build up to full engagement. Day one is learning the physical layout of the school, home base, cafeteria, recess, etc. Day two, add in some classes and build up to the full schedule. Day four the student begins to do academic work. Offer student mentors and prioritize access to basic needs and social support.

**Social & Emotional Support**

20. Offer an option of a place to sit with a familiar adult (or one they have at least met) but don’t assign seating. “Foster kids have to go through that process of finding a seat and making friends. It is hard but they have to learn how to do that. Don’t assign seats because that limits friendship building, but do offer a back-up option.”

21. Adults on lunch duty should sit at tables and not stand on the periphery. One person can walk around for better visual monitoring but all other adults should be at tables modeling meal habits & social skills.

22. Have a student group make conversation starters on cards & put on tables.

23. The cafeteria or any time in which the community is eating food should be a personal device-free time. Adults should only have or utilize personal devices during that time for student safety purposes.

24. Include culturally diverse foods in your menus to help all children feel welcome and represented.