

Characteristic 12

Making choices

A characteristic of good practice when teaching pupils with additional needs is that pupils can highlight different food preferences and the reasons for food and drink choices.

Overview

- Staff are aware of the factors that affect food and drink choice.
- Staff are aware of allergies, intolerances and food sensitivities of different pupils.
- Staff consider and apply factors affecting food and drink choice when making decisions for themselves and pupils.
- Staff develop Schemes of Work and lessons that integrate factors affecting food and drink choice and demonstrate progression.
- Staff develop and/or select resources and ingredients that support pupils to make informed choices, exploring a range of factors.
- Staff provide pupils with the opportunity to make choices, apply, and explain their knowledge through planning, verbal/written tasks and food activities, depending on individual pupil needs.



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Pupils with autism spectrum disorder commonly have a limited food selection or strong food dislikes. They may be sensitive to the taste, smell, colour and texture of foods and may limit or totally avoid some foods and even whole food groups. This is a worry for parents/carers, particularly in relation to a balanced healthy diet. I have worked with a number of pupils with very restricted diets, in order to help them make healthier choices.

For example, to encourage one pupil to eat more than spaghetti hoops at lunchtime, we began introducing a new food from the menu each day, such as a potato, or piece of vegetable. We gave him a tiny piece to initially lick, and then built up to a bite, eventually building up to eating a very small amount. We then introduced different foods in the same way – over time (a few months), he was then able to eat a selection of foods and used symbol cards to choose what he wanted to have

each day. He now eats a school meal every day, choosing his own food using symbols, including how many pieces he eats – his favourite is broccoli!

Being able to make choices includes more than just a balanced diet – it impacts on family life too. It means that families can eat a meal together; either around the kitchen table or in a restaurant.

DEBBIE'S TIPS

1. Use symbols and objects of reference to help pupils make choices for themselves.
2. Take time to build up a pupil's tolerance and acceptance of new foods – it can be a very slow process.
3. Work with parents and carers to continue familiarisation of different foods at home.

Putting the characteristic into practice

Exploring factors that affect food choice

In practice, staff:

- provide opportunities for pupils to learn that the choices people make around food and drink depend on a number of factors, such as allergy, intolerance, age, religion, personal preference, cost, time of day and occasion;
- consider local issues, religious, cultural, socio-economic and ethical beliefs when planning activities and dishes;
- devise lessons to allow pupils to explore personal preferences;
- introduce pupils to a range of fruit and vegetables, with an awareness of culture, parental/carer confidence and budgets;

- run food tasting lessons, enabling pupils to use their senses to taste and evaluate different food, being sensitive to those pupils who are tube-fed, on restrictive diets or have food allergies or intolerances.

Other examples:



Considerations when teaching pupils with additional needs

- Make art stamps using fruit and vegetables to introduce variety without pupils having to taste the food, e.g. if they have food sensitivities.
- Develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills through conducting a survey, using words, symbols or pictures, to find out about class or staff food preferences.
- Discuss meal occasions and the types of foods commonly eaten for each occasion. Make a dish for breakfast, lunch and an evening meal to familiarise pupils with the differences.
- Create a display of favourite meals and drinks, helping to show variety and personal choice.

- Ask pupils to draw a picture of themselves. Around the portrait, ask them to show in words, symbols, pictures or drawings, all the factors that affect their food choices, including likes and dislikes. Where appropriate, ask the pupils to explain their answers.

Other examples:

Putting the characteristic into practice

Making food choices

In practice, staff:

- provide opportunities for pupils to recognise healthy choices through practical experiences, e.g. selecting school meals, independent living activities, shopping, using food labels;
- challenge pupils to create new, or modify existing, recipes for different people and occasions, e.g. look at menus from a range of high street food outlets, choose a meal for a specific person and justify their choice;
- demonstrate how informed choices can be made through using food labels, ingredient lists and nutrition information (front and back-of-pack labels);

- encourage pupils to modify recipes, dishes and menus, based on their food tasting experience, and talk about the changes made and why.

Other examples:



Considerations when teaching pupils with additional needs

- Enable pupils to select between two simple choices, making the choices more complex over time, e.g. grapes or an apple at snack/breaktime, picking from two different pizzas.
- Plan a series of lessons that investigate how the cost of meals can be reduced through careful planning, choice of ingredients and cooking. These could include:
 - using local and/or seasonal produce;
 - using cheaper cuts of meat;
 - batch cooking;
 - using 'leftover' food to make a dish, e.g. mashed potatoes in fish cakes;
 - buying canned or frozen food or value/own brand ranges.
- Plan lessons that illustrate how special occasions are often linked to food, e.g. birthdays. Enable pupils to create dishes to share with their peers, where appropriate, encouraging them to taste new food, practise sharing with others and make choices based on preferences (likes and dislikes).

- Using several menus from high street food outlets, encourage pupils to choose a meal and explain their choice.

- Plan a series of lessons around eating to a budget, using leftovers or 'store-cupboard meals'.

- Look at a range of food packaging. Ask pupils to identify what information is used to help make a choice, e.g. nutritional content, ingredients, date marks, storage instructions, serving instructions, image/photo, quantity/number of servings, price (including special offers).

Other examples:

Putting the characteristic into practice

Exemplary practice

Governor/head teacher/senior leadership team

- Provide parents/carers with information and advice, to support healthy choices for their families and ensure a consistent message between school and home.
- Offer parent/carer and pupil practical classes to encourage healthy eating choices, development of practical skills and enjoyment of cooking.

Curriculum lead/coordinator

- Create a display in the entrance hall or library area, highlighting the factors affecting food choice.
- Work with parents/carers or members of the local community to offer a variety of cultural experiences to staff and pupils, e.g. tasting sessions, talks or cooking activities, using local or traditional ingredients/techniques.

Class teacher/teaching assistant

- Visit a local supermarket and investigate the seasonal fruit and vegetables on offer. Allow the pupils to choose an item and pay for it independently. Prepare the fruit/vegetables, cook if necessary, and taste them.

Other examples:



A list of useful websites to support this Characteristic can be found on page 75