



Supportive Food Environments

Toolkit For Schools

in Bass Coast and South Gippsland



Contents

Introduction	1
Checklist for Schools	2
Information for School Staff	6
Information for Families.....	15
Support for Students	17



The South Coast Prevention Team acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and acknowledges and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging. We celebrate, value and include people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures and abilities.

Introduction

Eating nutritious foods can improve mental health, enhance cognitive skills including concentration and memory, and improve academic performance.⁽⁷⁾ Schools can play an important role in positively influencing students' eating habits.⁽⁸⁾ Creating a supportive food environment where the food culture and activities reflect positive messages and practices, supports the physical, social, and mental wellbeing of young people, their families and school staff.⁽⁶⁾

The Supportive Food Environments Toolkit for Schools includes a range of resources to assist schools in Bass Coast and South Gippsland shire to create supportive food environments. The toolkit provides evidence-based information for use by school staff, students and families.

The resources in this toolkit use a whole-school approach to health and wellbeing based on five domains; leadership and commitment, healthy physical environment, healthy culture, student teaching and learning, supported staff, and families and community partnerships.⁽⁹⁾

The Supportive Food Environments Toolkit for Schools has been developed by the South Coast Prevention Team (Health Promotion workforce of Bayside Health Regional and South Gippsland Hospital).



"A wide range of students take part in the garden activities. They like to keep an eye on the growth of the vegetables and are more willing to have a taste when they have been involved in growing and making the food."

(Primary School Teacher,
South Gippsland)



Checklist for Schools

Use this checklist to assess your school environment. You can also use the checklist to track your progress against the actions.

Our Food, Nutrition and Oral Health Policy is current and reflects best practice approaches

Food and nutrition education is embedded in the curriculum through formal and informal learning opportunities

Nutritious food and drinks are available and prioritised through the canteen, lunch orders and breakfast club

Staff have access to food and nutrition related resources and professional development opportunities

We celebrate student achievements with non-food rewards

We prioritise using nutritious options in school food-related fundraising activities

Families, the school community and expert organisations are engaged in the promotion and implementation of food and nutrition programs and activities

Ways to create a supportive school food environment

Develop or review your Food, Nutrition and Oral Health Policy

Make tap water freely available⁽²⁾

Celebrate student achievements with non-food related rewards⁽²⁾

Provide staff with resources and professional development opportunities⁽¹⁾

Provide opportunities for your school community to celebrate and connect over nutritious food⁽⁵⁾

Provide nutritious food options⁽⁵⁾

Time and space to eat without distractions⁽²⁾

Ensure food and nutrition education focuses on enjoyment, fun, social connection and overall health and wellbeing⁽⁵⁾

Provide information to families about how they can support students to develop positive body image and relationships with food⁽⁶⁾

Use positive food language⁽⁴⁾

Celebrate all foods for their role in fueling our bodies and supporting growth⁽⁴⁾

Involve students in preparing and growing fresh produce⁽²⁾

Promote positive body image and display materials that reflect diversity of body shape, size, ability and ethnicity⁽³⁾

Celebrate cultural diversity in food practices⁽⁵⁾

Encourage curiosity by providing opportunities for students to explore the sensory properties of food⁽⁷⁾

Incorporate food education and related hands on learning activities across a range of curriculum areas⁽²⁾

1. Embrace Kids - [Safe School Environments for All Bodies](#)

2. Southwestern Public Health Unit - [10 Ways to Create A Supportive Food Environment in School](#)

3. Be You - [Learning Environments that Promote Positive Body Image](#)

4. Nutrition Australia - [Positive Food Language](#)

5. Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation - [How to Grow Healthy Students Food Education for Victorian Schools](#)

6. National Eating Disorders Collaboration - [Eating Disorders in Schools](#)

7. Butterfly Foundation - [Why the Term 'Healthy Food' Isn't Helping Our Children](#)

Commenting on students' lunches ⁽²⁾

Sending notes home about lunchbox contents ⁽⁵⁾

Categorising food as 'red', 'amber' and 'green' on canteen and lunch order menus ⁽⁴⁾

Making appearance-based comments relating to eating or food choices ⁽²⁾

Things to avoid when fostering a supportive food environment

Using labelling language when talking about food including "healthy / unhealthy" or "good / bad" ^(2,6)

Nutrition education which critiques food choices or lunchboxes ⁽³⁾

Food-based rewards ⁽²⁾

Food and nutrition education that focuses on weight and dietary control ⁽³⁾

Messaging that emphasises controlling weight through tracking, counting and restricting food ⁽¹⁾

Anything that promotes social comparison of bodies, weight and appearance ⁽¹⁾

Weighing students or other activities that ask them to calculate body mass index, record food intake or encourage calorie counting ⁽³⁾

1. Embrace Kids - [Safe School Environments for All Bodies](#)

2. Middlesex-London Health Unit - [10 Ways to Create A Supportive Food Environment in School](#)

3. Butterfly Foundation - [Fostering a Positive Body Image Environment](#)

4. Better Health Network - [Towards Size Inclusive Health Promotion](#)

5. Nutrition Australia - [Supporting Positive Lunchtimes](#)

6. Butterfly Foundation - [Why the Term 'Healthy Food' Isn't Helping Our Children](#)



Diagram 1: Possible ways to implement nutritious food-related activities in schools

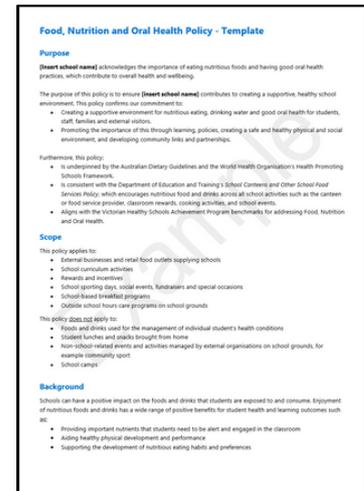
Information for School Staff



Review, update or develop a Food, Nutrition and Oral Health Policy

A Food, Nutrition and Oral Health Policy demonstrates strong leadership support and a shared commitment to creating a supportive food environment that promotes health and wellbeing for the whole school community.

When developing and reviewing a policy ensure staff, students and families are provided with opportunities to have input and provide feedback. This will help to ensure the policy is realistic, effective in practice, and promotes shared ownership.



Having a customised policy helps to bring about sustainable changes that address the needs and aims of your school. An example Food, Nutrition and Oral Health policy is available for [download](#). The [South Coast Prevention Team](#) can support your school to develop or update your policy.



Families and Community Partnerships

Schools, as health promoting environments, are well positioned to support children and their families to access nutritious food. There are a range of ways you can create a supportive school environment that promotes food sharing opportunities:

- Establishing a community pantry and connecting with local organisations for donations or Foodbank Victoria for [home food packs](#).
- Running a [School Breakfast Club Program](#)
- Implementing a school produce swap or produce trolley where families can access and share surplus produce harvested from the school garden or contributed by families from their home gardens.



Food and Nutrition Celebration Days

Food and nutrition-related activities provide a valuable opportunity to foster connection and celebration within your school community. Below is a list of celebration days that provide an opportunity to implement nutritious food-related activities in schools (see page 5 for example activities).

February

- National Lunchbox Week (9 - 15 Feb)

March

- Harmony Week (16 - 22 Mar)
- World Oral Health Day (20 Mar)
- World Water Day (22 Mar)

June

- World Environment Day (5 Jun)

July

- National NAIDOC Week (5 - 12 Jul)

August

- Dental Health Week (2 - 9 Aug)

September

- Biodiversity Month (1 - 30 Sep)

October

- World Mental Health Month (1 - 31 Oct)
- National Nutrition Week (12 - 18 Oct)
- National Water Week (19 - 25 Oct)

November

- Food Safety Week (8 - 15 Nov)

December

- World Soil Day (5 Dec)



"The students are talking about the foods that we are growing and offering. There are many who like to help with the preparation and cooking of the food, and they will often ask me to put the recipe in the newsletter so they can tell their parents, having a flow on effect to home."

(Primary School Teacher,
South Gippsland)





Vic Kids Eat Well

Vic Kids Eat Well is a free state-wide initiative that supports schools to offer nutritious food and drink options to students through breakfast clubs, canteens, lunch orders and fundraising. Vic Kids Eat Well is supported by the Victorian Government, and delivered by Cancer Council Victoria's Achievement Program, in partnership with the National Nutrition Foundation's Healthy Eating Advisory Service.



Achievement Program

The Achievement Program is a free state-wide health and wellbeing framework that supports schools to create a healthier environment for their students, staff and families. It empowers schools to build upon existing efforts and embed sustainable improvements across key health areas, including food, nutrition and oral health. The program is supported by the Victorian Government and delivered by Cancer Council Victoria.

The South Coast Prevention Team can support your school to implement Vic Kids Eat Well and the Achievement Program.

Contact prevention@basscoasthealth.org.au.

Vic Kids Eat Well Local Case Studies



St Joseph's Primary School Korumburra

St Joseph's Primary School Korumburra have supported students to plant, harvest and cook new vegetable filled options to be added to the breakfast club menu. Local non-for-profit enterprise Grow Lightly generously donate a box of fresh local apples every week to ensure students have access to fresh fruit to start their day. [Read the case study.](#)

Loch Primary School

Loch Primary School have boosted their breakfast club menu by adding fruit and vegetable options to fuel students day of learning. The school now offers a daily fruit and vegetable platter featuring a range of colourful seasonal produce.



Welshpool & District Primary School

Welshpool & District Primary School have refreshed their vegetable garden with staff and students growing, harvesting and cooking vegetable options that are cooked up ahead of time, frozen and then added to the breakfast club menu. [Read the case study.](#)



Use positive language when talking about food and eating

- Avoid calling foods 'junk' foods, and categorising them as 'good', 'bad', 'healthy' or 'unhealthy'. This can encourage black and white thinking about food and can create a sense of guilt or shame about eating particular foods.^(1,2)
- Use language such as 'colourful and delicious', 'fresh and tasty' or simply call foods by their name. This encourages students to feel comfortable eating a variety of foods that support both nutrition and enjoyment.⁽²⁾
- Talk about the sensory qualities of foods such as smell, texture and appearance, and encourage students to use their senses to explore food.
- Avoid making appearance-based comments related to eating or food choices. Even well-intended remarks like 'You look so healthy' can reinforce harmful body image messages.⁽⁵⁾

Keep the traffic light food framework behind the scenes

Avoid labelling foods as 'green' 'amber' or 'red' on canteen menus and price lists. The traffic light system is intended for menu planning purposes, not to be displayed to students.⁽²⁾

Involve students in preparing and growing food

Providing opportunities for students to grow, harvest and connect over cooking fresh produce encourages interest in a range of fruits and vegetables.⁽⁴⁾

Embrace cultural diversity through food

Providing opportunities to celebrate cultural diversity in food practices is a great way to promote inclusion and belonging. Your school could host a cultural food day or develop a bush tucker garden.⁽⁴⁾

Rewards

When celebrating student achievements opt for non-food related rewards like free time, trinkets, certificates or school points. Providing non-food related rewards promotes inclusion regardless of dietary restrictions and food sensitivities.

Providing food rewards can create the expectation that food should be consumed (or restricted) in response to student actions or behaviours.^(2,6)

Get creative with fundraising

Promote nutritious, colourful and fresh foods when using food-based fundraising. Alternatively, there are a range of creative and fun non-food related fundraising options that will get the whole school talking.

Professional development opportunities

School staff play a crucial role in delivering positive food education and creating a supportive food environment. Below are organisations that provide professional development opportunities:

- Butterfly Foundation
- CERES School of Nature and Climate
- FreshSNAP
- Healthy Eating Advisory Service
- National Nutrition Foundation
- OzHarvest
- Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation
- Victorian School Garden Program

Useful resources

Nutritious recipes:

- [Crunch&Sip](#)
- [Foodbank](#)
- [Healthy Eating Advisory Service](#)
- [Nutrition Australia](#)
- [Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation](#)

Kitchen garden activities:

- ABC Kids and Gardening Australia Junior: [Composting for kids](#)
- Food from Home: [Monthly growing guides](#)
- Junior Landcare: [Learning activities](#)
- Koori Curriculum: [Top tips for creating a bush tucker garden](#)
- Mid North Coast Local Health District: [Kitchen garden teacher resource](#)
- NSW Department of Education: [Composting - A how to guide for schools](#)
- Soil Science Australia: [Soils in schools teacher guides](#)
- Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation: [Food education booklet](#)
- Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation: [Mindfulness in the garden resource](#)
- Victorian Schools Garden Program: [School gardening resources](#)



★ Food waste:

- OzHarvest FEAST: [Food waste activities and posters](#)
- ResourceSmart Schools: [Waste a how to guide](#)
- World Wildlife Fund: [Food waste resources and lessons plans](#)

★ Food and nutrition:

- OzHarvest FEAST: [Activities, recipes and videos](#)
- Phenomenom: [Toolkit](#) with videos and lesson plans
- National Nutrition Foundation: [Resources](#)
- Harmony Week: [International food discussion dice activity](#)
- Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation: [Global recipes for the classroom](#)

★ Canteens:

- Healthy Eating Advisory Service: [Promotional ideas to boost canteen sales](#)
- Healthy Eating Advisory Service: [Canteen meal ideas](#)
- Healthy Eating Advisory Service: [Canteen snack ideas](#)
- Healthy Eating Advisory Service: [Schools recipe costing template](#)
- Healthy Eating Advisory Service: [How to improve your school canteen menu](#)





Body image, eating disorders and positive food language:

- Be You: [Resources to promote positive body image in schools](#)
- Butterfly Foundation: [Education resources](#)
- Eating Disorders Victoria: [Eating disorders factsheets](#)
- Eating Disorders Victoria: [Mindful eating fact sheet](#)
- Embrace Kids: [Creating safe school environments for all bodies resource](#)
- Mental Health First Aid: [Eating disorders mental health first aid guidelines](#)
- National Eating Disorders Collaboration: [Eating disorders in schools booklet](#)
- Nutrition Australia: [Positive food language resource](#)
- ReachOut: [Eating disorders lesson plan \(years 9 -10\)](#)
- ReachOut: [Resources to support young people with body image](#)
- ReachOut: [Resources to support young people with eating disorders](#)

Sign up to the [South Coast Healthy Schools Newsletter](#) to stay up to date with opportunities and resources to help improve the health and wellbeing of your school.

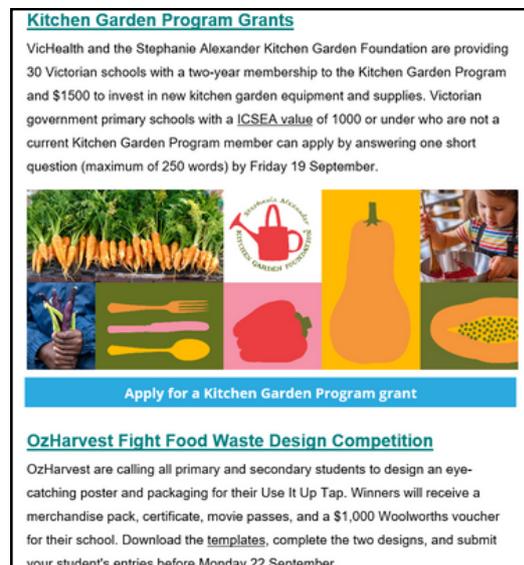


South Coast Healthy Schools and OSHC
Health and Wellbeing Newsletter

Welcome to our sixth edition of the South Coast Healthy Schools and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) Newsletter for 2025. This newsletter is filled with ideas and resources to help improve the health & wellbeing of your school and OSHC community. If you would like support to deliver any of the projects listed below please contact the South Coast Prevention Team on 0438 057 040 or email prevention@basscoasthealth.org.au.

In this newsletter:

- [Have Your Say and Win a Fresh Produce Box](#)
- [What's Coming Up](#)
- [Vic Kids Eat Well!](#)
- [Smoke and Vape-Free School Challenge](#)
- [Active Classrooms Primary School Challenge](#)
- [Kitchen Garden Program Grants](#)
- [OzHarvest Fight Food Waste Design Competition](#)
- [Healthier Hearts & Lighter Minds](#)
- [Victorian Schools Garden Program Awards](#)



Kitchen Garden Program Grants

VicHealth and the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation are providing 30 Victorian schools with a two-year membership to the Kitchen Garden Program and \$1500 to invest in new kitchen garden equipment and supplies. Victorian government primary schools with a ICSEA value of 1000 or under who are not a current Kitchen Garden Program member can apply by answering one short question (maximum of 250 words) by Friday 19 September.



[Apply for a Kitchen Garden Program grant](#)

OzHarvest Fight Food Waste Design Competition

OzHarvest are calling all primary and secondary students to design an eye-catching poster and packaging for their Use It Up Tap. Winners will receive a merchandise pack, certificate, movie passes, and a \$1,000 Woolworths voucher for their school. Download the [templates](#), complete the two designs, and submit your student's entries before Monday 22 September.

Information for Families



Provide information and resources to parents and carers



Recipes to promote and inspire family connection through cooking:

- [Healthy Eating Advisory Service](#)
- [Nutrition Australia](#)
- [Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation](#)



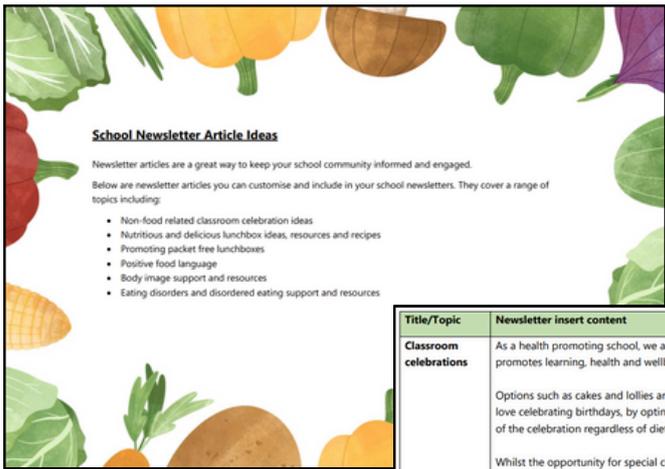
Body image, eating disorders and positive food language information and support:

- Butterfly Foundation: [Body image resources & activities for families of primary school children](#)
- Butterfly Foundation: [Body image tips for parents](#)
- Butterfly Foundation: [Early intervention for eating disorders: how to start the conversation](#)
- Eating Disorders Victoria: [Eating disorder information and resources for friends and family](#)
- Eating Disorders Victoria: [Mindful eating](#)
- Mental Health First Aid: [Eating disorders mental health first aid guidelines](#)
- Nutrition Australia: [Positive food language](#)

★ **Resources to support affordable and nutritious lunchboxes:**

- Live Lighter: [Sandwich builder](#)
- Nutrition Australia: [Balancing the lunchbox](#)
- Nutrition Australia: [Leftovers for lunchboxes](#)
- Nutrition Australia: [Nourishing grab'n'go foods](#)
- Nutrition Australia: [Tailoring lunchboxes for different needs](#)
- Nutrition Australia: [Tasty budget friendly lunchbox recipes](#)
- Nutrition Australia: [The uneaten lunchbox](#)
- National Nutrition Foundation: [Love what you eat resources](#)

Download [newsletter articles](#) you can customise and share via your school communication channels



Title/Topic	Newsletter insert content
Classroom celebrations	<p>As a health promoting school, we are committed to creating a safe, inclusive and supportive school environment that promotes learning, health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Options such as cakes and lollies are commonly provided to celebrate student birthdays in the classroom. Whilst we love celebrating birthdays, by opting for non-food related celebration options we are ensuring all students can be part of the celebration regardless of dietary requirements.</p> <p>Whilst the opportunity for special class celebrations will be made available in the classroom, we understand that some families like to provide items from home. There are many fun ways to celebrate birthdays at school without making cake and lollies the star of the party for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a large birthday card for the class to write birthday wishes • Providing small items like stickers or bubbles to share with class members • Providing chalk for the class to write birthday messages on the pavement or chalkboard in the classroom <p>Celebrating with fun activities and non-food related items works to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment where everyone can join in the fun.</p>
Inspiring students to eat nutritious and delicious foods	<p>We all want children and young people to enjoy a wide range of nutritious and delicious foods.</p> <p>Inspiring children to try new foods can be challenging. Involving your child in lunchbox and food preparation helps to build their interest in nutritious food and can build their confidence to try new foods.</p> <p>Encourage them to help in the kitchen, at the shops and in the garden. You could</p>

Support for Students



Encourage students to utilise support services in times of need

Butterfly National Helpline

- Free and confidential support for anyone concerned about eating disorders or body image issues, whether you need support yourself or someone you care about.
 - Online chat
 - Email: www.butterfly.org.au/get-support/helpline-email/
 - Phone: 1800 33 46 73 (Monday - Friday, 8am - midnight).

Please note the Butterfly National Helpline is not a crisis service. In case of an emergency, please call 000, or if you are in crisis call Lifeline 131 114 or Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800.

Eating Disorders Victoria

- Free, friendly and confidential service for anyone in Victoria to help get information about eating disorders, listen to your experience and help find support.
 - Phone: 1300 550 236 (Monday - Friday, 9:30am - 4:30pm)

headspace Wonthaggi

- Free and confidential support for young people aged 12 - 25 with mental health, physical health, alcohol and other drugs or work and study support
- Address: 5b Murray Street, Wonthaggi, Victoria 3995
- Phone: 5671 5900
- Email: info@headspacewonthaggi.org.au

Youth Assist Clinic (YAC) Foster

- Free drop-in clinic for 12-25 year olds to support with physical, mental and sexual health concerns.
- Address: 87 Stations Road, Foster, Victoria 3960
- Phone: 0492 844 000 (Mondays during school term from 12pm - 4:30pm)
- Email: youth.services@sghs.com.au

Kids Helpline

- Free and confidential phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 - 25.
- Phone: 1800 551 800

References

1. Better Health Network (2023), '[Towards Size Inclusive Health Promotion](#) Better Health Network Melbourne', accessed 6 October 2025.
2. Southwestern Public Health Unit (2025), '[10 Ways to Create A Supportive Food Environment in Schools](#)', accessed 6 October 2025.
3. Embrace Kids (2024), '[Creating Safe School Environments for All Bodies](#)', accessed 6 October 2025.
4. Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation (2025), '[How to Grow Health Students Food Education for Victorian Schools](#)', accessed 6 October 2025.
5. Butterfly Foundation (2024), '[What schools can do to address appearance talk and why it matters](#)', accessed 6 October 2025.
6. Windsor-Essex Country Health Unit (2024), '[School Nutrition Toolkit: How to Create a Supportive Food Environment at School](#)', accessed 6 October 2025.
7. Healthy Eating Advisory Service (2024), '[Food, mood and learning outcomes](#)', accessed 21 January 2026.
8. Gingell T, Esdaile E and Gallegos D (2025), '[School food and nutrition environments in Australian primary schools: A scoping review](#)', accessed 27 January 2026.
9. Cancer Council Victoria (2026), '[Healthy Schools](#)', accessed 27 January 2026.

Supportive Food Environments Toolkit For Schools

Thank you for using the Supportive Food Environments Toolkit for Schools.

We hope you found this resource useful.

If you have any feedback on this toolkit, please contact the South Coast Prevention Team on prevention@basscoasthealth.org.au or call 0438 057 040.