

Talking points

Here you can see collected responses to the talking points raised in Failsafe Newsletters

February 2008: a reader from Victoria wrote 'I work in our school canteen and just shake my head when I see what we are selling! Unfortunately the new healthy guidelines have really only meant labelling a few things low fat and cutting out lollies. Everything else is laden with artificial colours, flavours, preservatives and MSG. I cringe when I see kids with behaviour issues spending \$\$\$ every day'. We would like to hear from others – **is your school canteen like this?**

THE REPLIES

'watched kids become unteachable'

For too many years, as a former high school teacher and Head of Department I have watched kids become unteachable after morning tea even worse after lunch. - teacher, Qld.

These items should not be available to children

A 'lunch box approved' hamper has two items - pop tops and fruit sticks - that I know contain 211 and others (211 sodium benzoate is the main one my son reacts to). They are approved by FOCiS (previously the Federation of Canteens in Schools). These items are misleading and should not be available to children. - by email

How to avoid problem foods at canteens (... don't eat them!)

To avoid the problem foods we face at the school canteen I have made failsafe sausage rolls, cake (a different recipe from what we have at home) and have supplied the canteen with Paddle pop lemonade iceblocks (they weren't able to purchase them because of the "healthy" canteen rules). We have them all labelled in the freezer. My children are able to participate in the important part of school culture of lunch orders and not feel left out. - Trudi, by email

'my group of 15 y/o boys with 'literacy/behavioural' problems buying stuff'

My children's school canteen is appalling! I'll list some of the things on offer to give you the picture: mineral Water (Orange, Blue, Green, Cola, Red); chicken flavoured crackers; noodles (BBQ/Chicken); chips assorted; pies, pizza; flavoured chicken wings - I think you get the picture. Needless to say my children are not allowed to buy anything from the canteen since we went on a 'low additive' diet and my son has been gluten free. (We have been so pleased with the changes in our son's behaviour and learning since we dropped the nasties.)

There are a number of parents that are not happy but the school principal and canteen manager are very resistant to change. I see what some of the other children in my 5 y/o son's class bring for recess and are amazed. The school is currently conducting a survey as they are reviewing their canteen policy so we can only hope that things will improve.

The high school that I work at as a teacher is just as bad. I do my lunch duty in there twice a week and just stand and shake my head as I see my group of 15 y/o boys with 'literacy/behavioural' problems buying stuff that I know is going to send them off by the time I have to teach them! I have talked to them at length about the problems my son has had and some of them have told me that they were put on similar diets as children. – teacher, NT

'no one is looking at preservatives'

As a Food Service Rep for a company with a product approved by the NSW Canteen Association (even though I can't give it to my daughter because of preservatives), I travel around and display our product at Canteen Network Meetings. I am there with the likes of Baiada, Steggles, Chikadee, Early Rise Pies, Mrs Macs Pies and NOW Eagle Boys Pizzas!! which have been approved for sale in NSW primary school canteens. I think it is disgusting. The school orders the pies and they are delivered individually in a hot cell bag ... just like Friday Night take away. How on earth can this be deemed as healthy, and how does it not encourage take away food. I am so incensed at present with what I am seeing ... it's ok for

there to be low salt and 99% fat free, but no one is looking at preservatives etc. I think they've got it all wrong. I am about to start a Diploma in Nutrition, in the hope that once I have a qualification I can begin spreading a more accurate picture on what we should be feeding our children. – Food Service Rep, NSW

Feel sick in the stomach when I see what they are selling

I too cringe when I go near our school canteen and have expressed my concerns about the flavoured popcorn and chips they are selling to our children. I don't get to help in the canteen as I have toddlers and they are not allowed, but when I help at weekend events I sneak a peek at what they are selling and just feel sick in the stomach. (I have stopped my daughter having lunch orders since the beginning of this term and had her on failsafe eating, with amazing results, we are so grateful for finding your web site.)

Over the past 18 months, they have been getting rid of foods like hot dogs, pies, sausage rolls, lollies etc. The thing I'm frustrated about is they are still selling those awful packet noodles, flavoured potato chips, flavoured popcorn (with 621, 635). I'm also worried about letting my daughter have a lunch order as I'm unsure if the bread they use has 282 in it. I suppose I'm just not happy with the school canteen and would love to see them change it, but how do I do this? – Mary, by email

November 2007: in Failsafe Newsletter #53 we asked “**Is there a short simple way of explaining why you are doing the diet that people will understand?**” Here is the range of interesting answers:

THE QUESTION

My 3-year-old and I are currently doing the elimination diet for his behaviour. I have noticed that people who have an allergy can say my child is allergic so he is on the elimination diet and people accept it no questions; a friend with an autistic child can say my child has autism so he is on the diet, and again it is accepted no questions. But because we are doing the diet purely for behaviour problems we get unlimited amounts of criticism over it. I am constantly hearing it's just normal toddler behaviour. I have tried explaining that on the basic diet I do have a normal toddler - we still have normal toddler conflict and tantrums, however we don't have the extremes of behaviour where he is out of control and literally runs up and down the hallway screaming and aggressive with me ending up in tears. I don't expect a perfect child, just a normal one ... Is there a short simple way of explaining why you are doing the diet that people will understand?

THE REPLIES

* Why should you have to explain. People should respect your wishes with regard to what you do or do not want your child to eat. Although when I tell people what my 7 year old can have, I then explain about the tantrums and defiance he showed when he was younger and how I am not stressed any more, most people accept that. The ones that don't, I don't leave my child with. - Dawn

* I've had the same experience trying to explain why my son has a restricted diet. Only 2 weeks after starting the elimination diet, a friend who is a paediatrician commented on the radical change in my son's behaviour, but when I told her about the diet she dismissed it completely. This is a pretty typical response from people who have no idea what it's like to have a 3yo bulldozer that runs over the top of everything and bounces off the walls.

If anyone asks I now just tell them “his body doesn't tolerate artificial additives”. If they express any interest in finding out exactly what that means, I'm happy to elaborate, but mostly they don't. I'm sure most of my friends think I'm a nutcase, but the proof is there for all to see and in the end it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks, because I know that the result is that my life is easier and I have a happier child. - Jacqui

* Many people didn't believe that my children were sensitive to many foods and chemicals. So I no longer explain to many people, and I don't care what they think. My daughter recently

became really difficult, and then I discovered that the ingredients to her bread had changed. Within two days of swapping her bread, a lot of family commented on her improved behaviour, and I told them it was because of the change in her diet. Those people no longer comment on why I keep her on a weird diet, and now actually support me. I only took 6 years!! There is no easy way to explain to people who don't understand so don't try. It is well worth persevering with diet, especially as it becomes more public and newsworthy. – Kate

* Regarding the issue of trying to explain to people about the diet and your kids behaviour, it seems all I ever do. I have 2 children, now 6 ½ and 9 ½. Through trial and error we have discovered they are intolerant to some foods and it does affect their behavior, our main culprit was to our shock and horror, dairy. Our son in particular, from the moment he woke up until he nodded off at night was wound up, he never walked anywhere, it was always running at full speed and too busy to hear or be told anything, extremely noisy, and the list goes on. It was extremely frustrating and depressing. He never got invited over for playdates, birthdays.

Now I just tell people now that our kids have intolerances, not an allergy and we need to be very cautious about what he eats. Most people are ok with this, but there are the minority who think behavior problems are just poor parenting, it's not. There are always the do-gooders who think they know best, you know your child and if it works for him and your family life don't worry about what others think or say. It would be great if we all had perfect children, but the truth is that we don't.

We were pressured to put our child on medication at 5yo, and it had a negative effect on him, we then began to rethink our options and decided to go totally failsafe, within days we had what could be considered a normal child. He is still a busy boy but far more compliant and less aggressive. We too still have some issues to deal with but at least we can see a noticeable difference.

You don't need to explain yourself to anyone, your child's improved behavior is all the justification you need. – Marie

* I usually tell people my son only eats limited foods because otherwise he suffers. That way, people know it's not just one food to be avoided, but many, and it's a quick way of explaining. I find many people don't want great detail, anyway.

As an aside, while most people accept that my son's diet is restricted, they don't understand that I also am on a restricted diet. So the message that additives affect kids is getting through, but people are not realising that additives affect adults, too. (and that is not to mention salicylates...) Melinda, Tas

* Thanks so much for all your work to bring the issue of food intolerance to the general public. We have been living in ignorance and some of us in a kind of hell wondering why we are all so grumpy and not very nice! I noticed the DVD Fed up with Children's behaviour at the library and having bought the Failsafe Cookbook we have tried to change our diet over the last few months. I must say that we have not managed to take on the full failsafe diet but have cut out additives almost completely. It is very difficult socially to say to people "we don't eat that" especially when it is already in the hands of the children so we have had times when they have eaten things and then later had behavioural effects. However, it seems to have made a big difference overall in our behaviour especially for my three year old son, my eight year old daughter and myself. I have cut down on salicylates and feel better. When people ask about it I say that when I saw the cookbook and the cover said "for calm, happy families" I realise that was all I wanted for my family and that it has helped us to calm down a lot.

I would recommend, when confronting objections from family and friends, to say that you want a calm, happy family and ask the objector if they would be able to help you with that by humouring you and going along with your wishes. If you often find yourself surrounded by critical and unsupportive people it may be wise to keep away from these situations for a while. I'm sure most real friends and loving family members are able to respect decisions that their loved ones make regarding this issue. – Rosy, WA

Use big but informative words to keep them quiet! E.g., as a responsible parent, you are ensuring that your child sticks to the elimination diet as he is neurologically compromised by additives, preservatives etc and for his optimal learning function.

All of which is true. Behaviour comes from brain function. My 5yr old daughter calls it her 'cranky brain' when we get it wrong and her behaviour suffers....and likewise she will have a bad day at school the following day or so until she recovers from the 'hit' - her teacher can tell, now when she's having an 'off day' . If people are helpfully interested, then obviously you can explain further...the more that know, the better! - Traci
