

To whom this may concern:

My name is _____ and I am _____.

Recently, _____.

As a parent, I have serious concerns about this assignment because of the unintentional harm that can be caused when school lessons and assignments focus on weight or moralize food as good or bad. This assignment is not only developmentally inappropriate, but it also contains potentially harmful content. While well intended, messages like these can burden children with a lifetime of body image struggles and confusion about food, as well as lead to the development of an eating disorder.

Over the last 20 years, how and what we teach children about food has become more weight focused and developmentally inappropriate. Instead of teaching children where foods come from, cultural food differences, that all food serves a purpose, and to care for and respect their bodies, we teach fear and mistrust. Nutrition is not black and white and when we teach children nutrition in a fear based, absolute way, we create more fear and confusion. Children are supposed to be gaining weight, it is a sign of health and development. When school nutrition lessons convey the message, whether blatant or implied, that weight gain is bad, we teach our children that their growing bodies are bad.

For Preschool and Grade School Students

As you know, young children are concrete thinkers. Nutrition and health are abstract concepts. When we tell children certain foods are good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, "red light" or "green light", we are trying to teach them an abstract concept in a concrete way. Young children may hear this lesson and become fearful of the foods that the educator deemed as "unhealthy." Sensitive children may stop eating adequately because of this fear around food. Some children may feel shame that the food they are served at home isn't on the "good" list (please take food access into consideration). Children respect you as their teacher and often see you as the expert. Imposing your personal beliefs about food may influence your students' thoughts about food. Please remember, your words have a significant impact.

For Middle School and High School Students

As you well know, middle school and high school are pivotal years in puberty, growth and development. They are also impressionable years that make children more susceptible to inappropriate and dangerous messages about food and body. Instead of teaching our middle and high schoolers to distrust their bodies and fear food, we need to be teaching them that their growing bodies are wise and taking good care of them, nourishing them fully, is important for their whole life.

Dieting is a risk factor in the development of an eating disorder. How we talk about food and bodies in school can have an impact on how our children view their bodies and how they approach food throughout their lifetime.

Eating disorders have the second highest mortality rate of any mental illness, with one person dying every 52-minutes.¹ **At some hospitals, medical admissions for eating disorders for adolescents have doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic.**² In addition to that frightening statistic, this is also the reality our children live in:

- 81% of ten year olds are afraid of being fat.³
- 35% of 5 year old girls are already on a diet.⁴
- Awareness of dieting as strategies for weight loss emerges as young as 3-years-old, and significantly increases from 3- to 5-years-old.⁵

I would like to make you aware of several resources that may be helpful in bringing information about body inclusivity to our school.

The National Alliance for Eating Disorders (The Alliance) is the leading national eating disorder nonprofit organization providing education, referrals and support for all eating disorders.

Sunny Side Up Nutrition is a free resource and podcast for parents and educators about developmentally appropriate nutrition education, family feeding and raising children to be competent eaters.

The Alliance and Sunny Side Up Nutrition would be wonderful allies in building a body positive culture and curriculum for our school that would support students' physical and mental growth. Both organizations are also available to present training to your staff and faculty, as well as referral and support services.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter. I am asking that you please reconsider this assignment, as it may be harmful and saddle our children with a lifetime of food and body struggles. I look forward to hearing from and working with you to help prevent eating disorders and spread body inclusivity at _____.

Warmly,

1 Deloitte Access Economics. The Social and Economic Cost of Eating Disorders in the United States of America: A Report for the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders and the Academy for Eating Disorders. June 2020. Available at: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped/report-economic-costs-of-eating-disorders/>.

2 Otto AK, Jary JM, Sturza J, et al. Medical Admissions Among Adolescents With Eating Disorders During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Pediatrics*. 2021;148(4):e2021052201. doi:10.1542/peds.2021-052201

3 Collins, M.E. Body figure perceptions and preferences among pre-adolescent children. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 1991 March; 10(2):199-208.

4 Damiano SR, et al. Dietary restraint of 5-year-old girls: Associations with internalization of the thin ideal and maternal, media, and peer influences: 5-YEAR-OLD GIRLS' DIETARY RESTRAINT. *Int J Eat Disord*. 2015;48(8):1166-1169. doi:10.1002/eat.22432

5 Rodgers RF, et al. "Stop eating lollies and do lots of sports": a prospective qualitative study of the development of children's awareness of dietary restraint and exercise to lose weight. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act*. 2015;12(1):155. doi:10.1186/s12966-015-0318-x

Resources



National Alliance for Eating Disorders

www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com

www.findEDHelp.com



www.sunnysideupnutrition.com

www.sunnysideupnutrition.com/podcast