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## I Think The Policing Of School Lunches Has Gone Too Far

**BY JOSEPH WILSON**

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Sometimes I open the fridge in the morning and stare at the shelves with the hopes that, if I wish hard enough, a lunch will leap, fully formed, into my girls' backpacks. There are 190 school days in a year and every one of those starts with the same question: what should I make for my child's lunch?

Kids are not always the easiest customers: they send back food they didn't order, they demand variety and are frustratingly picky eaters; their tastes seem to change every week. You also must make sure there is nothing that could cause an allergic reaction, plus most schools have a zero-garbage policy so make sure you have a good stock of Tupperware.

## **Relevant Reading:** 10 Ways to Hack Packing Lunches

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/food/view/10-ways-to-hack-packing-lunches-for-school-or-work>)

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And if one more person tells me my kid should be eating organic, I'm going on strike. The realization that nutrition and healthy eating habits are crucial for learning has pushed most ministries of education in Canada to enact policies banning the sale of candy, pop and energy drinks at schools. But some teachers are taking this even further and poking their noses into children's packed lunches.

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"If one more person tells me my kid should be eating organic, I'm going on strike."

Last year, for my eldest daughter's birthday, her uncle made her a batch of homemade éclairs. (Seriously, have you ever tried to make an éclair? It's not easy.) The next morning I cut one in half as a treat for her lunch. When she came home from school, she let me have it.

"Dad, don't put stuff like that in my lunch," she said.

"Why not? It's delicious." I said.

"But it's junk food. We're not allowed junk food," she said.

"It was homemade; it's ok to eat like that sometimes," I protested.

"Well, the teacher didn't like it," she said.

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## **Relevant Reading:** DIY Lunchables (The Healthier Way)

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/food/view/diy-lunchables-the-healthier-way>)

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The teacher let the infraction slide, "just this once," and my daughter ate her éclair furtively, under the jealous glare of her classmates.

Shame is not a healthy emotion to have at the lunch table. If students internalize such judgments, it ends up having the potential to divide the class based on the contents of their lunch boxes.

Another source of lunch-based division I've noticed emerging in my youngest daughter's class is a split between the kids who have a hot meal delivered through a paid service and the kids who bring lunches from home.

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"Shame is not a healthy emotion to have at the lunch table."

“Dad, I want a hot lunch!” she said one day as we walked back from the bus stop.

“Why?” I said, “you don’t like the lunches I make for you?”

“The hot lunches come in metal containers; they get chicken and quinoa.”

“You often don’t eat quinoa when I make it for dinner.”

“Yes but it’s better than my lunch,” she concluded, with the kind of self-evident logic that only makes sense to a five-year-old.

At an extreme, this kind of judgment can create cliques in the classroom that mirror class lines. Not everybody can afford the hot lunch service. And busy parents might not have time to cook every day and might rely on pre-packaged fruit gummies or Lunchables. The kids are starting to notice.

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### **Relevant Reading:** 20 Easy Lunch Box Ideas

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/food/view/20-easy-lunch-box-ideas>)

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A friend has butt heads with her daughter’s teacher recently over the teacher’s insistence that students eat the food in their lunch in a particular order: sandwiches and vegetables first, then any sweet stuff (including fruit), for “dessert.”

After having a conversation with the teacher, it emerged that my friend and her had very different opinions on how to introduce values of healthy eating. The teacher insisted she was modelling good eating behaviour and that the students would internalize the rules for healthy eating by the time they hit middle school. My friend explained that if the teacher dictated exactly what and when her daughter should eat, she would never learn to decide for herself. The stalemate continues.

Lunch is about more than just food. It has become a site of judgment on the morality of eating “good food” and the class lines that emerge as a result. Our kids have enough to worry about at school these days; let’s take lunch off the table as a source of shame.

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