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EXTENSION**

Family Matters

Improving Health Together

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Valentine's Day Treats: Fun, Safe, and Allergy-Friendly!

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Valentine's Day parties are a wonderful opportunity to celebrate friendship and community in the classroom. These parties are often filled with treats and snacks, so it is important to consider both food safety and food allergies as you prepare. Here is how you can ensure your treats are safe and inclusive while keeping the celebration sweet.



Food Safety for Young Children

Children's developing immune systems and smaller bodies make them more vulnerable to foodborne illnesses. Following these safety tips help ensure your treats are safe:

- **Avoid choking hazards**
 - Stick to soft, age-appropriate foods.
 - Skip hard candies, whole nuts, and popcorn for children under four.
 - Cut fruits and vegetables into small, easy-to-chew pieces.
- **Handle food safely**
 - Wash your hands before preparing any food.
 - Make sure all surfaces, utensils, and storage containers are clean.
 - Have children wash their hands before eating.

Allergy-Friendly Treats

Many schools have strict no-nut policies or guidelines on homemade treats. Check with your child's teacher for specific policies and to find out if there are any food allergies in the classroom.

- **Read labels:** Always check ingredient labels for allergens like peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs or wheat. Look for certified allergen-free options.
- **Label homemade treats clearly:** Include a list of ingredients with your contribution. This step allows teachers or staff to double-check for allergens.
- **Share non-food items:** Fill small bags with items like stickers, crayons, or small toys to share.

If your school or childcare center requires store bought treats, consider these allergen-free options:

- Apple sauce or fruit and veggie pouches
- Fruit snacks
- Popcorn (for children over 4 years old)
- Gluten-free pretzels
- Plain or flavored rice cakes
- Frozen popsicles
- Chex mix without nuts
- Baked potato chips

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Let's Talk

Talk to your child about how they can help keep their friends safe when bringing treats to school. If they are old enough, you can teach your kids how to check ingredient labels for allergens. Here are some ways to talk to children about food safety and food allergies:

- **Understanding Food Safety:** "When we share food at school, it's important to keep everyone safe. That means washing our hands before touching food, keeping it wrapped until it's time to eat, and not sharing food we've already touched or eaten."
- **What Are Food Allergies?** "Some people have food allergies, which means they can get very sick if they eat certain foods like peanuts, milk, or eggs. Even a small amount of this food can cause a problem, so we need to be careful."
- **Choosing Safe Snacks:** "For our Valentine's Day party, we can pick snacks that are safe for everyone. We can check with your teacher to find out what treats are okay to bring so no one gets left out or sick."
- **Being Inclusive and Kind:** "If a friend says they can't eat a certain food, we need to listen. You can ask them, 'What are you allergic to?' Or 'which treats are safe for you?' or make sure there are non-food options like cards or stickers to share."

Recipe for Health

Heart Shaped Fruit Kabobs

Ingredients:

This recipe calls for three types of melons, but you can use any melon or fruit that you would like! Melons are easy to cut with a cookie cutter and easy for small mouths to nibble.

- 1/4 seedless watermelon, cut into 1/2 inch slices
- 1/4 honeydew, cut into 1/2 inch slices
- 1/4 cantaloupe, cut into 1/2 inch slices

Directions:

1. Wash hands and food contact surfaces with soap and water.
2. Cut the watermelon, honeydew, and cantaloupe into 1/2 inch slices. Use a small heart-shaped cookie cutter to cut out the desired number of hearts from each fruit.
3. Using plastic or wooden skewers, thread the hearts onto each skewer. Serve and enjoy!



Optional Dipping Sauce

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups plain Greek yogurt
- 1/4 cup honey (**Please note:** Children under 1 year old should not consume honey.)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Directions:

- Wash hands and food contact surfaces with soap and water.
- Mix all ingredients in a bowl and refrigerate for 1 hour to combine flavors before serving.

For more information, ideas and recipes visit the Colorado State University Food Smart website at: foodsmartcolorado.colostate.edu

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