

Independent Living Instructors and Social Workers: This Page Is for You

Food Diaries

Several *Represent* writers got interested in eating more nutritious food by keeping food diaries for a week. (We were surprised to see that it is possible to survive on Twix candy bars.) Here is a sample from one student's daily diary:

Breakfast: None

Lunch: None

Dinner: None

Snacks during day: Cheese doodles, potato chips, chocolate and vanilla cookies, Sprite, Coke

Comments: Feeling hungry, empty and tired.
Think I'll go to bed now.

Reflect (15-20 min.):

Based on their own experience and the story they've read, ask students what they'd like to do differently. Is there one food they'd like to stop eating? One they should eat more of? Why is it hard to eat more healthy and nutritious food? (For example, are students restricted to eating what's offered in schools or group homes? Do their neighborhood stores carry mostly junk food? Are nutritious foods too expensive, not tasty enough, or just plain unfamiliar?)

Ask the teens to identify one thing they could do differently to eat more nutritiously. (The short article on page 21, "Help Yourself," has nine good suggestions.)

Options:

- If possible, get a nutritionist to come in and talk about healthy eating, and teach the teens how to read the nutrition labels on the back of food packages. (The teen writers found this to be a revelation.)

- After our writers learned a bit about healthy food, we had them prepare a menu, shop, cook and eat a healthy meal together. It was a lot of fun, and really got the teens thinking about changing their eating habits.

- Depending on the issues in your group, consider reading these other stories, or suggesting students read them on their own:

"Scaling Back" p. 22, deals with the relationship between eating, sexual abuse, and medication.

"Dangerously in Love with a Danish" (p. 20) will make your teens laugh out loud while they learn about food addiction.

Lesson (one hour):

Keep food diaries (week prior to class): Have your teens keep a simple food diary like the one above for one week. You can type a form that has all seven days on one sheet of paper (to make it easy for them), or just ask them to record the information on a piece of paper they keep in their purse or wallet.

Discuss (15-20 min):

At the end of the week, have students share their diaries and talk about what they ate. Encourage a wide ranging discussion about what they ate, where they ate it, how much they liked or disliked what they ate, what it cost, and how it made them feel.

Read Aloud (15-20 min.):

Read Pauline Gordon's story, "My 'Hood Is Bad for My Health," p. 16. It covers several topics, including being forced to eat what's cooked in the home (even if it's not very healthy), the difficulty of finding nutritious food in her neighborhood, and the challenge of getting accustomed to the taste of new foods, like soy milk.

For more activities, go to:

www.youthcomm.org/Teachers/TeacherResources.htm