

## **Notes for Parents and Caregivers**

For decades, Dr. Colleen Cannon and I have been working with adults who struggle with their eating habits. Adults can successfully learn to manage problematic eating triggers and responses, but it's a very challenging process. This is because adults have strong learned associations with food. Each adult has uniquely personal eating habits.

This relationship with food and eating begins at birth. Drinking milk provides physical comfort to an infant, satisfying his empty stomach. The feeding is also associated with a sense of warmth and security while nestled in the arms of an adult. What a positive experience!

As the child develops, food continues to provide energy and nutrients for his growth and good health. Food also takes on other roles in the child's life. Food may be offered as a reward, as part of celebrations, as a soothing tool or as a distraction. These associations are filed away in the child's mind. Add in food marketing messages, eating routines, learnings, and possibly medical or diet advice.

As an adult, he is likely unaware of the food and eating information stored in his mind. Yet, these messages and associations have a powerful influence on his eating behaviour.

So, why not address this 'relationship with food and eating' at an early age? Let's teach children skills to develop a positive and healthy relationship with food. Who knows? When you explore the 'kinds of hunger' together, you may better understand your own unique relationship with food.

### **Stomach, mouth or heart hunger?**

Changing or developing a behaviour begins with self-awareness. Self-awareness promotes problem solving and helps us make decisions. The 'kinds of hunger' concept is a simple, effective self-awareness technique for eating.

It's important that the 'kind of hunger' is not labelled as negative or undesirable. Each of the three kinds of hunger is normal and acceptable. It is the 'desire to eat at that moment' that is labelled, not the child or the child's behaviour. The main goal is to have a better understanding of one's relationship with food.

Once the kind of hunger is identified, you and the child can learn and experiment with responses that satisfy the 'hunger'. This helps promote a long-term, positive and healthy relationship with food and eating.