



Guiding Principles

Purpose: To develop a shared understanding and commitment to intentionally creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive space at **Kingston Cooks** workshops for people of all backgrounds and relationships with food and their bodies. This document will serve as our promise of that intention to the community.

Shared Understandings

Health disparities exist.

Not everyone has the same access to living a healthy life. Inequalities exist across different incomes, race and ethnicities, disabilities, sexual orientations, gender, gender identity, and other factors. Even people in the same city can have widely different access to healthcare, food, and opportunities for physical activity as well as time, money, equipment, and ability to cook or be active.

Food choices are complex.

While certain foods are more nourishing for our bodies, food is also more than just nutrients. Food is also our family, culture, history, community, identity and more. Food can be nourishing for the body, mind, *and* soul. Additionally, not everyone has the same access to healthy food, nor do they have the same amount of time, money, and equipment to prepare “healthy” meals from scratch.

BMI and weight as measurements of health are flawed and complex.

There are many contributing factors to weight and body size, and people with a higher weight can be as healthy as people with a lower weight. Additionally, focusing on weight perpetuates weight stigma, leading to lower quality of healthcare and even avoidance of seeking necessary healthcare. Lastly, for people who struggle with eating disorders or disordered eating, focusing on weight or BMI perpetuates these struggles.

Health comes in many different dimensions, not just physical health.

“Health” is more holistic than just our physical health. We also have emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, occupational, and environmental health. To only focus on physical health, including foods that have been identified as “optimal” by their nutrient content, overlooks so many other equally important needs. We can take a broader, more well-rounded approach to health by focusing on wellness or our well-being.

Health is both a personal and communal journey.

Everyone should get the opportunity to define health and well-being for themselves. In that way it is deeply personal. We also know that individual behavior choices only make up 30-40% of the contributing factors to an individual’s health. Environmental factors, policies, and other social determinants of health have a large influence. Individual health will not be achieved through self-care alone, but also through community care.

Our personal health and the health of our planet are intimately connected.

The food that we grow and eat, as well as the food that we do not eat through food waste, not only affects our individual health, but also the health of our planet. Extractive and exploitative food growing and processing harms both the bodies of food system workers and the Earth. Climate change affects our health through increased planetary temperatures, droughts or flooding that are risky for our safety and negatively affect our food system, and more.

Shared Agreements

Joy is the most important nutrient.

Above all, we commit to maintaining a spirit of joy and fun in our workshops as we celebrate food, health, and each other.

Our approach to encouraging a healthy lifestyle is weight-neutral.

Where conversations or education occurs around healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle, it will focus on other metrics of health, such as perceived sense of health and well-being, or biometrics such as A1c, blood pressure, or cholesterol instead of weight.

Avoid good vs bad food dichotomies, and no food shaming.

There is a fine line between neutrally sharing information about food, including nutritional content, and assigning “good” vs “bad” labels on foods or food groups. Be aware of implicit bias or shaming as well as explicit. As the kids say: “don’t yuck my yum.”

Healthy can have many definitions.

While many community nutrition programs use the USDA definitions of healthy and that is the basis from which we start, we know that health is defined by more than just physical health, and there are many strong historical and cultural health traditions not always reflected in these definitions. We honor this wisdom through respect and cultural responsiveness. What is nourishing for one person’s body might look different from another’s.

We honor the personal aspects of everyone’s health journey through supportive community care.

We make space for multiple paths towards health and wellness without judgment as long as those paths are not causing harm. We honor the wisdom, experience, and expertise of all our community members.

We respect the health of our planet and our local food system just like our own.

Where possible, we will make food decisions that prioritize local agriculture, sustainable practices, and food waste reduction.

Inspiration and References

- [Arizona Department of Health Services' Language of Health](#)
- [Common Threads' Food Philosophy & Practice Standards](#)
- [Center for Well-Being and Happiness's Core Values](#)
- [National Eating Disorders Association](#)
- [American Medical Association Clarification on BMI Policy Statement](#)
- [Robert Wood Johnson's Guiding Principles](#)
- [UCONN Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health's Shifting the Conversation: Moving Towards a Weight-Inclusive Model of Health Care](#)
- [American Journal of Public Health- Obesity Stigma: Important Considerations for Public Health](#)

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