

Peanuts...to ban or not to ban?

By Phoenix Family & Parenting Examiner,
Jennifer Allen

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According to the "[School Nutrition Operations Report: The State of School Nutrition 2009](#)" released in September by the School Nutrition Association, only about 34.7% of schools have banned any foods due to food allergies. The most commonly banned food item is peanuts. The report also tells us

that as a direct result of food allergies and sensitivities, more than 20% of districts now offer gluten-free food options. While many parents of allergy affected children have sought a complete ban on peanuts at schools, there are mixed emotions as to whether or not this would actually solve any problems.

Elizabeth Cowles who works with the non-profit [School Nutrition Association](#), explains "one common concern we've heard many school foodservice professionals cite is the false safety that a complete ban can create." She continues,"they ultimately have to rely on compliance from all parents and students to make a food ban effective."

Elizabeth's concerns are echoed by Corinne Gregory, founder and President of [SocialSmarts](#) (a nationally-recognized schools-based program that teaches good social skills, positive character and values). Bans and isolating a student with allergies can further alienate a child who already feels "different". Corinne has encountered increasing occurrences of bullying in the form of "tainting" foods or even trying to force-feed a child the very ingredient they are deathly allergic to. She adds "kids have been known to contaminate personal items or work surfaces with the allergen". Such bullying tactics are absolutely horrific to imagine actually taking place but Corinne

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stresses "it's vital that parents, teachers, and the public know about this nasty practice as they strive to keep kids safe."

So if bans and isolation are not the answer, then what can we do to help these children? Enter Lori Aronsky, owner of [Food Allergy Ally](#). She volunteered some wonderful strategies that are already being successfully practiced at many schools. First, education. Fellow classmates, teachers, parents and other faculty must be aware of the severity and risks involved. She recommended some wonderful books for kindergarten and first graders to help them understand and hopefully sympathize with the difficulties of living with a food allergy:

- [Chad the Allergic Chipmunk: A Children's Story of Nut Allergies](#)
- [Allie the Allergic Elephant: A Children's Story of Peanut Allergies](#)

On the subject of classroom etiquette, Lori ads that "when a child brings nut products to school it is by choice. When a child comes to school with nut allergies, it is not by choice." She points out that if you create a "nut table" and a "safe table", the "safe table" will invariably be the larger of the two, further isolating and alienating the allergic child. Kids like to sit with their friends. She ads "my experience has been that most kids will decide to bring safe food to school, so they can sit with their friends with nut allergies...even

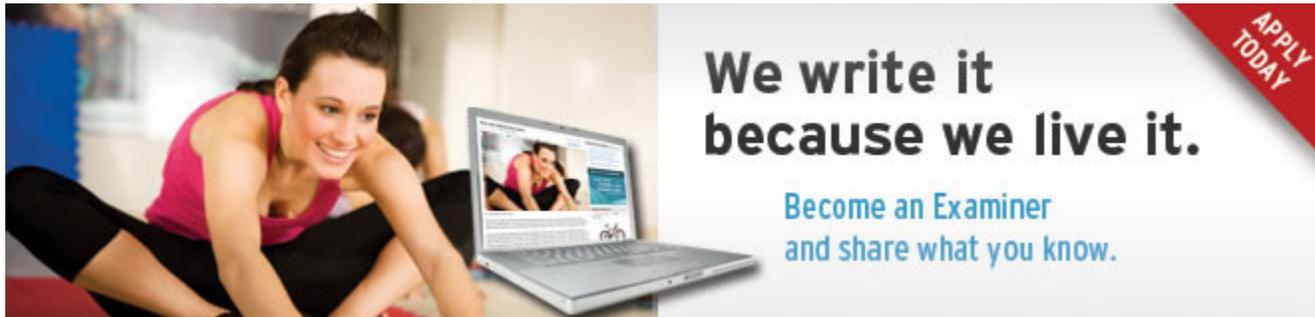
remind[ing] their parents not to send nut products" so they can sit with their allergic friends. She recommends having a contraband table where those who bring nut products must sit. This keeps the allergic child from being isolated and encourages kids to bring safe snacks so they can sit with their friends.

Several others spoke up with great methods for addressing the cafeteria concerns. Gina Lincicum describes the arrangement at her cafeteria as ideal for helping her son who deals with a severe peanut allergy feel more accepted. The lunchroom is arranged so that the kids with allergies can sit with their own class rather than a separate table off in a corner. At the end of each table, there's a section marked off with tape and pictures that clearly read "No Peanut Zone". Adult monitors help younger children sit in the right section. Anyone with PB&J is moved to the father end of the table. Those with n-PB lunches can sit in the middle or even in the No Peanut Zone. Her son is even allowed to participate in cafeteria cleanup with the rest of his class, usually being assigned sweeping instead of table washing). "it is very integrated and comfortable", Gina adds.

Tatia Prieto, a K-12 consultant, primarily in the operational areas (a.k.a. school lunch) explains her cafeteria's similar arrangement. They generally eat lunch by classroom. A

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card is attached to the end of each table with a color coded dot for the various types of medical emergencies the staff needs to be aware of at that table. Confidentiality is maintained by faculty having a binder near the cash register that includes student names and even pictures that correlate to the dots on the table cards.

For more information: Check out www.mytimecalendars.com/blog for tips on how to help a child self manage their allergies at school, suggestions on classroom safety and more "safe" snack and lunch suggestions. Also check out their [forum](#).

	Phoenix Family & Parenting Examiner
	Jennifer Allen
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