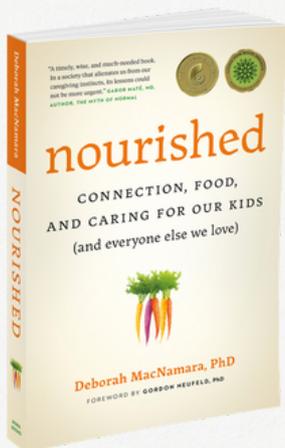


Gather to Eat

Attachment, Food, and Caretaking

Presentations by Dr. Deborah MacNamara

When feeding children becomes fraught with pressure, worry, and power struggles, something essential has been lost—despite our best intentions to nourish and care well. The key is in understanding how food serves us best when it serves togetherness.



In *Nourished*, Dr. Deborah MacNamara shows us how feeding is part of the caretaking relationship and cannot be separated from it. Informed by attachment science, developmental psychology, neuroscience, and research on human emotion.

Awarded Gold from Nautilus and Living Now for best parenting and health and wellness book in 2024.

Food was never meant to stand alone. Across human history, feeding has been one of our most powerful ways of conveying love, safety, and belonging. Yet today, eating has become increasingly depersonalized—focused on nutrients, outcomes, and control—often severed from the relational context in which nourishment is meant to unfold.

Drawing on Dr. Deborah MacNamara's award-winning, research-informed work in ***Nourished: Connection, Food, and Caring for Our Kids (and Everyone Else We Love)***, these presentations invite parents, educators, childcare providers, and helping professionals to reconnect food with relationship. Through a developmental and relational lens, they explore how feeding, emotion, attachment, and care come together—or fall apart—in homes, schools, and communities.

Rather than offering techniques or prescriptions, this work restores confidence in the adult's role as nurturer—helping adults use food as it was always meant to be used: as a powerful expression of care that strengthens connection, supports well-being, and helps children (and those who care for them) come to rest.

Why a Developmental- Relational Lens for Feeding and Eating Matters

Many feeding and eating challenges are approached as behavioural problems or nutritional concerns, disconnected from the emotional and relational conditions in which eating unfolds. A developmental-relational lens starts from a different place.

Eating is not just about what children eat, but who feeds them, how they are fed, and whether they feel safe enough to be receptive. When pressure, stress, alarm, or disconnection enter the feeding relationship, eating can become stuck showing up as picky eating, power struggles, refusal, digestive distress, or rigid patterns around food.

Gather to Eat presentations explore feeding challenges at their roots—where food, emotion, attachment, and development intersect. By understanding what disrupts receptivity and what restores it, adults can create the conditions that support competent eating, emotional well-being, and stronger relationships, returning food to its rightful place as a source of nourishment and care.





Presentation Menu

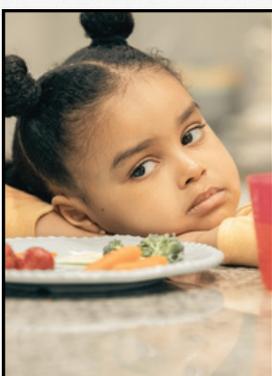
Gather to Eat presentations provide a developmentally grounded orientation to feeding and eating through the lens of relationship, emotion, and human development. They can be offered as keynotes, workshops, or half-day or full-day learning experiences, and tailored to parents, professionals, educators, and community audiences.

For professionals and communities seeking continued learning and application, extended professional development is available through the signature Gather to Eat course. Learn more at gathertoeat.com.



1. Gather first, then eat: How food, emotion, and attachment come together

We have never known more about food—yet feeding and eating struggles continue to rise. This presentation reframes nourishment as a relational and emotional experience, not a nutritional task alone. Participants explore what has been lost as food has been separated from caregiving, and how restoring the relational context of eating supports receptivity, emotional well-being, and resilience.



2. From Picky Eating to Power Struggles: A Developmental Lens on Eating Difficulties

From selective eating and food refusal to mealtime battles and control struggles, feeding challenges can leave adults feeling anxious and unsure how to proceed. This presentation helps participants understand eating difficulties as stress responses rather than behavioural problems, and why pressure and outcome-focused approaches often intensify resistance. The focus is on restoring receptivity and trust over time.

Gather to Eat Presentations



3. Gut Feelings: How Emotion and Stress Shape Digestion, Feeding, and Eating

Digestive discomfort, feeding, and eating challenges are increasingly common in children, often showing up as stomach aches, constipation, reflux, appetite changes, or distress around meals. This presentation explores the powerful connection between emotion, stress, and digestion, helping participants understand how alarm and nervous system strain can interfere with eating and digestion based on new gut-brain research. The focus is on creating conditions that support digestive ease and eating receptivity through emotional safety and caretaking.



4. The Wisdom of Eating Together: The Secrets of the Table and Why Shared Meals Matter

Across cultures and history, eating together has played a central role in human survival and belonging. This presentation explores why shared meals support emotional well-being, relational bonds, and resilience—and what gets in the way today. Rather than prescribing idealized family meals, participants are helped to reclaim the meaning and purpose of gathering to eat in realistic, compassionate ways.



5. Reclaiming Nourishment: Why Food Cannot Nourish Without Relationship

When food becomes separated from relationship, it loses its capacity to truly nourish. This presentation invites participants to rethink nourishment altogether moving beyond nutrients, schedules, and strategies to consider how care, intention, and emotional presence transform eating into a deeply human experience. Adults leave with renewed confidence in their role as providers and caretakers.

The Nourished Circle

The **Nourished Circle** was created to support parents, professionals, and communities who want to explore *Nourished* together—in **book clubs, professional reading groups, school communities, and caregiving teams.**

Nourished Circles are designed to invite reflection, conversation, and lived understanding—honouring feeding as one of our oldest and most relational ways of caring.



Nourished Circles can stand alone or be paired with a presentation, offering a way to deepen learning, strengthen connection, and keep the conversation alive long after an event ends.

Your Nourished Kit includes:



Bulk books are available to order within Canada and international locations including United States, Australia, NZ and Europe at 20% reduced price.

Each Nourished Circle Kit includes:

- A favourite recipe from the book *Nourished*
- Mint and moringa tea for each participant (Canada), inspired by a story in Chapter 1
- A printable discussion guide with three core questions to support meaningful dialogue
- A shared group exercise that brings the ideas to life
- A welcome video from Dr. Deborah MacNamara
- An invitation to a complimentary 30-minute live Q&A session with your group

Contact us: <https://macnamara.ca/contact/>

About Dr. Deborah MacNamara



Translating developmental science into everyday practice for parents, educators, childcare and helping professionals.

Dr. Deborah MacNamara is an award-winning researcher, author, developmentalist, counsellor, and educator with over 25 years of experience supporting parents, educators, childcare providers, and helping professionals in making sense of children's behaviour, emotional well-being, development, and feeding challenges. She has presented internationally including the *United Nations*, *Dalai Lama Center for Peace & Education*, and the *Neufeld Institute*.

Through her clinical work and teaching, Deborah has worked extensively with families and professionals responsible for caring for and feeding children—both within homes and in early learning, childcare, educational, and community settings.

Her work brings together food, emotion, attachment, and development, helping adults understand how eating challenges often reflect stress, disconnection, or unmet developmental needs rather than behavioural problems alone.

Deborah is on faculty at the Neufeld Institute and teaches nationally and internationally, translating developmental science into practical, relational care. Drawing on her experience as a teacher, counsellor, and educational administrator, she emphasizes adult leadership, emotional safety, and relationship as the foundation for healthy development.

Books

- *Rest, Play, Grow: Making Sense of Preschoolers (and Anyone Who Acts Like One)*
- *Nourished: Connection, Food, and Caring for Our Kids (and Everyone Else We Love)*
- *The Sorry Plane (children's picture book)*

Nourished received a Nautilus Gold Award for Parenting (2024) and a Living Now Evergreen Gold Medal for Health & Wellness (2024). Both books are published in more than 15 languages.

Reflections from Participants

-  *"The biggest thing getting in my way, was society's desire for "healthy eating", "good manners", "fuel for your body". I have had to re-wire my brain and it has been the best for my own stress levels (as the behavioural lens never felt good to me), and for my relationship with my children."*
-  *"Most importantly, I have let go of my wired desire to have my kids "finish their plate" or "eat three more bites". I am more focused on the caring nature and calm energy that I bring to the table instead of what goes into their mouths."*
-  *"Picky eating isn't about the food! Resonates with my situation perfectly with my step-daughters.. I feel finally more support that i am not doing it wrong."*
-  *"I didn't quite realize that before the course, and letting go of the nagging, and talking about food, and worrying about what she used to eat and doesn't anymore (often in her presence) has been life changing."*
-  *"What has resonated with me most deeply, is the way in which you've not only applied theoretical truth and understanding about the nature of human development (for child and adult alike, for all of us), but also, the way in which you've gone about this work is, in itself, relational! I feel as though you've been speaking personally to me."*

Want to Work Together?

Every community is unique, and learning is most meaningful when it reflects the people and context it serves. Deborah is happy to explore the needs of your school, organization, or parent community and how this work might best support it—whether through a keynote, half-day or full-day learning experience, or a longer-form series.

To begin a conversation please visit:
<https://macnamara.ca/contact/>

