

A teacher's survival guide to vegans in the class

Veganism is on the rise and more and more children are choosing to follow a vegan diet and lifestyle. In this document we have information to help you understand veganism, and the things you might need to consider, and potentially alter, to ensure any vegan children in your class are included and not excluded.

We have collected lots of feedback from vegan parent across the country, to help us form this guide on the common misconceptions and areas where vegan children feel left out, and ways you can help them to feel more included in the school setting.

What is veganism?

Firstly, veganism is far more than a diet choice, it is a lifestyle choice and also a protected right under *The Equality Act 2010*.

The Vegan Society definition of vegansim is:

“Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.”

Veganism is based around the fact that we should cause the least amount of harm to animals as is possible, by sourcing alternatives to animal products where we can.

What we don't do

- Consume any animal products.
- Consume any products that have been made by animals.
- Wear any clothing that has come from an animal.
- Use any materials that have come from an animal, in clothing, craft activities.
- Visit places that use animals for entertainment.
- Avoiding products that have been tested on animals.

Key things we don't eat or drink

- Any animal flesh, meat, poultry or fish.
- Milk from another species such as a cow or goat, and any products containing milk.
- Eggs from any animal, and any products containing eggs.
- Honey.

Sometimes animal products are hidden in things we would not expect. Here are some examples:

- Some breads have milk, butter or egg and sometimes other ingredients derived from animals.
- Chocolate – Cocoa itself is vegan. However, many brands of chocolate add milk to the products so always check the label. A lot of dark chocolate brands are suitable for vegans, but not all. There is also ranges of specifically vegan chocolates.
- Sweets – Many sweets have gelatine in them, which is derived from either pigs or cows. There are more and more vegetarian sweets coming onto the market, but a lot of these use beeswax as a glazing agent, so even, if sweets say they are suitable for vegetarians, they may not be suitable for vegans.

- Lots of beer and wine is not suitable for vegans. Isinglass, a gelatin-based substance derived from fish, is used to clear sediment from wines and beers. Sometimes egg whites and milk are also used in the process to produce wine.
- Some foods that are red in colour can be coloured using a red food dye called cochineal, which is made from ground up beetles.
- Shellac is often used to glaze foods such as sweets and dried fruits and comes from the Lac beetle.

Things to watch out for

Not all products are marked consistently and it is not law to state whether or not a product is suitable for vegan. There is a lot of products that are accidentally vegan but not marked as such.

You can find a useful list of vegan supermarket products here:
veganwomble.co.uk/supermarket-vegan-lists/

Many 'free from' products are not necessarily suitable for vegans. A lot of products may be dairy free or gluten free but still contain egg or milk, for example.

What if a product says it 'may contain milk or eggs'?

In most cases, products are made on the same production line as milk products, and because of this there may be a tiny risk of contamination, so manufacturers have to, by law, place the allergy warning on the packaging. In most cases this is the equivalent of finding a worm in your apple; it does not mean the apple is not vegan. As a general rule if the product does not have animal products listed in the ingredients the product would be considered vegan.

If in doubt, check with the parents before giving anything to the child.

Why Vegan?

People choose a vegan lifestyle for many reasons, but mostly veganism is adopted because of environmental or animal welfare reasons.

Humans can get all the nutrients they need from plants, so vegans believe it is not necessary to eat meat or fish. The Vegan diet is proven to be better for the environment, so many people fighting against climate change are adopting a vegan or plant based diet.

Most vegans do not agree with animal cruelty. Particularly, younger vegans can become distressed, as they do not want to harm animals, so it is important to be aware of how using animal products in your class may affect a vegan child. Being vegan is much more than just a diet choice. For example, if they were to see an egg and spoon race using real eggs, this could make them feel sad or angry. They may not wish to partake in collecting eggs from school chickens, or use animal based ingredients in experiments or cookery lessons.

The great news is that, in almost all instances, there are vegan alternatives available.

Some people adopt a vegan diet for health reasons, although these are often referred to as following a plant based diet and not necessarily as vegan, as they may still wear animal products.

Activities which would be against veganism

- Food or cooking classes where ingredients from an animal are used.
- Experiments using any products derived from animals.
- Sports games using real animal products such as an egg and spoon race.
- Trips to zoo, farms, aquariums, or animals being used for amusement.
- Collecting eggs from chickens.
- Arts and craft activities such as feathers are often made using real animal feathers.
- 'Sports' involving animals, such as horse racing/riding, dog racing or fox hunting.
- The contents of some books and work materials could be distressing to vegan children.
- Farm activities, books and stories about the farm, if they involve animals.

How you can help to include vegan children in class

Provide alternatives where possible, that are as similar as possible, or consider using vegan alternatives for the whole class so the child(ren) doesn't feel left out or excluded. In most cases vegan products are suitable for all children and a lot of vegan speciality products cater for a range of allergies too. Often the alternatives taste, look and feel the same as the animal products.

Plan school trips to places that vegan children would feel comfortable about visiting.

Speak to the parents of the vegan child if you need any help sourcing alternatives, or if you are unsure whether it would go against the child's beliefs.

Allow vegan children to share their thoughts, ideas and views with the class.

We often get asked why vegans would want to eat a meat substitute product. The simple answer is, because most vegans do not give up meat because they did not like the taste of meat, and they still enjoy the substitutes. We are lucky to have products available that are, in some cases, indistinguishable to the meat versions, but which do not harm animals. From a vegan's point of view, why would you not eat the substitute product?

Vegan children speaking out

Many vegan children are very passionate about veganism, and, while it is important for them to understand that people make different choices about the way they live their life, and that everyone is entitled to make their own choice about their lifestyle choices within the law, it can be distressing for a vegan child to try to understand why others have chosen to eat animals. They have grown up in an environment where they believe it is wrong to kill animals, so it can be distressing for them when they discover that others do it.

Vegan children should be encouraged and praised for their compassion to animals and for not wanting to cause unnecessary harm to animals, and it is important to have their views heard, and encourage debate among their peers. It is always good to hear both sides, to understand we all have different views about what is acceptable and what is not.

A lot of information is hidden from us about food production and what really goes on, and a lot of children and adults are unaware of how food is produced.

Understanding a vegan's view point

Our children may not be able to communicate their ideas and thoughts effectively, especially at a young age, and may say things like 'cows milk hurts cows'. So we want to be able to explain from a vegan's point of view why vegans don't hurt animals.

Here are some of the things vegans believe:

Animals should not be killed for meat when we can get the full range of nutrients we need from plants.

No other species drinks another species' milk, and no other species drinks their mother's milk beyond infancy. Vegans believe that cows' milk or goats' milk is meant for the infant cows and not for humans. Vegans believe that we should not take the milk away from the animal, particularly when it causes harm and distress to the mother and calf.

In the dairy and egg industry\male chicks and calves are a by product, not required by the industry. The cost to keep these animals alive is often too high so the males are often killed at birth, or sold on for low grade meat. Even within the dairy and egg industry, animals are killed for food.

Chickens have been over bred to produce more eggs than they would otherwise naturally.

Leather is made from cows' skin, and, while it is considered a by product of the meat industry, there are still animals killed solely for the clothing.

Many people believe that wool is simply a hair cut for sheep, and that it needs to be cut. While this is true in modern farming, in the wild sheep would naturally shed their wool, and the conditions used to keep the sheep in order to mass produce wool and the sheering methods used are not kind to the sheep.

Honey is a substance bees make to store in their hive for winter. Without it they can die, and in many commercial hives it is cheaper to cull the honey bee population over winter, or replace the honey with a sugary substance. Interfering with bee populations has hurt our wild bee population. Bees naturally swarm and move hives, but in a lot of honey production the queen bees have their wings clipped to that she does not move hives. The big machines used to take the honey have little regard for the bees, often killing them.

We can not only survive but can thrive on a plant based diet. There are many alternatives available to humans, so we do not see the need to eat, use or exploit animals. As humans, we are gifted with a conscience and the ability to see right from wrong and act upon that knowledge.

Other resources

The Vegan Society has lots of information and resources for schools at: www.vegansociety.com/

Teach Vegan has lots of resources for school teachers at: teachvegan.org.uk

As well as vegan version of the eatwell plate at: teachvegan.org.uk/vegan-eatwell-plate

Other information is available at: www.animalaid.org.uk/education/

