

# Tips for Water Access and Safety Messaging

- ✓ **People know drinking water is healthy.** About half of people report they drink more than 5 glasses of water each day to stay hydrated and for their health. Some forget to drink it during the day and others think they are drinking enough water even when they aren't. It is good to restate health benefits as a shared value between you and your audience.
- ✓ **Understand your audience's experience.** Water safety is not a concern for many people—most assume their tap water is safe. However, water safety is of concern for African-American, Latino and people with low-incomes and they are more likely to report water that is brown or rust colored, cloudy or funny smelling.
- ✓ **Create urgency.** In general, there is not a lot of urgency when it comes to the issue of water. But there is great urgency in certain parts of the country that have experienced water issues. It will be important to create urgency in all messaging. Talking about investing now – before a crisis happens.
- ✓ **Focus on children.** Parents know the importance of water in their children's lives and it is important for them to understand the water situation in their kids' school. Twenty three percent of parents are unsure of what their children do for water during the school day. The majority of people support testing tap water in schools and providing public reports on the results.
- ✓ **Give audiences specific things to do!** Many people are ready to act if they learn their community's water is not safe – they will sign a petition, contact a policymaker, go to a local meeting or talk to neighbors.
- ✓ **Be aware! People provide reasons for why they will not get involved in water advocacy.** First, they think their community's water is already safe, whether or not they have seen an official safety rating. Second, they think it will cost too much to improve. But, most say they would be willing to pay more to improve and modernize the water infrastructure in their community.
- ✓ **Do not get caught in the trap of pitting tap water versus bottled water.** The majority of people are not sympathetic to the environmental arguments regarding water in plastic bottles—they feel that recycling water bottles limits possible environmental damage.
- ✓ **Frame safe water as a basic human need** is more powerful than presenting it as a civil right.

## Key Water Messages (\*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

- ★ **Everyone, no matter where they live, should have access to safe drinking water. Water is a basic human need—something people cannot live without.**
  - It is unacceptable in this day and age that communities have unsafe drinking water—yet many low-income communities and communities of color are likely to report problems with their water.
  - Safe drinking water makes families and children healthier—it helps muscles, joints, tissues, improves the digestive system and keeps the body hydrated.
  - It is not fair that so many people are forced to buy filters or bottled water because they live in areas with unsafe tap water. People deserve access to safe tap water in their communities.
  - More must be done to ensure everyone in this country has safe water in their communities, their schools and their childcare centers.

## Language to Emphasize/Language to Avoid

Messages that resonate best are clear and simple. They use everyday language free of jargon and communicate shared values and emotion. Below you'll find a list of words/phrases Voices for Healthy Kids encourages you to use (left-hand column) when talking about child care. Language in the right-hand column includes terms and phrases not as easily understood or impactful when looking to engage your audience.

<i>Use This Language</i>	<i>Instead of This Language</i>
✓ Safe water	✗ Potable water, high quality water
✓ Water as a basic human need	✗ Water justice, civil right
✓ Sugary drinks	✗ Sugar sweetened beverages, SSBs
✓ Low-cost, free	

## Tips for Effective Messaging to Support Public Policy Change

### 1 Connect with supporters.

When communicating to gain support for policy, systems, and environmental changes that help kids grow up at a healthy weight, it is important to use language that will move people to take action. By framing your message in a way that paints a picture of how the current environment makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make healthy choices, you can create a sense of urgency and the need to take action. Make sure to clarify that the change and action you're calling for is about transforming environments to make it easy for people to eat healthy and be physically active and less about creating personal behavior change.

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### 2 Use the right words.

While obesity is a chronic disease, most people still think of it as a personal problem with a personal solution. They believe if someone is obese or overweight, that person just needs to eat less and be more physically active. They don't immediately see the need for public policy solutions. However, when talking about people facing obesity-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease, most people agree that we need to work together to find a solution to the problem. Avoid using "obesity" and instead emphasize the health threats posed by heart disease and/or diabetes.

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### 3 Emphasize choice.

People are most supportive of healthy changes if they don't fear their choices will be limited. When talking about adding healthy options, stress the array of overall choices offered to people, especially parents who we are here to support, so the focus is not on the removal of unhealthy options.

### 4 Use the right messenger.

Messages are only as strong as the person delivering them. Is the person delivering the message credible? Are they representative of the community most affected? Do they have personal experience related to the issue? Are they respected by the audience? The best messenger needs to be determined for each situation and location. For example, when messaging on health issues, the best messenger could be a doctor, a nurse, or a patient. Make informed decisions about the most culturally appropriate messenger on an issue.

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### 5 Stress consumer education as ONE piece of the puzzle.

People believe education is the best way to encourage behavior change. But helping all children grow up at a healthy weight is a complex challenge and education is only one part of the solution. Reinforce consumer education as key to awareness building about the problem and solutions, but emphasize other initiatives that drive system-wide policy change. For example, with tobacco use, warning labels did a great deal to educate consumers but the change in norms and dramatic drops in smoking rates happened when environmental changes happened like prohibiting the sale to minors and making workplaces smoke-free.

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### 6 Alleviate skepticism and build trust.

People are very skeptical of government and framing our solutions only from that lens can prevent us from getting our message through to key audiences. Introduce policy, systems, and environmental change efforts to the public with words like "services," "resources," "partnerships," as people are more inclined to embrace this terminology instead of "regulations," "mandates," "bans," "funding," and "government."