

The Building Blocks of a Healthy Future

Tips for Effective Early Care and Education Messaging

- ✓ Emphasize that parents and providers are on the same page and both support consistent standards, but do not focus on lack of consistent standards.
- ✓ Provide specific examples of the standards parents want to see.
- ✓ Stress that all kids in child care deserve the same opportunities to eat healthy and be active, but do not point out that it's more important for kids from low-income populations.
- ✓ Look for opportunities to convey a sense of urgency with your messages. When regulations for early care and education providers are up for review there is a limited time frame for input and the regulations may not be up for review again for several years, so advocates should stress the timeliness of the issue.

Early Care and Education Messages (*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

- ★ Every kid deserves a healthy start in life. No matter where children live or go for early care and education, they all deserve healthy food and physical activity. It will help them grow up healthier, and children learn better in healthy environments.
- Parents support clear and consistent standards in early care and education settings for food and beverages, active play, and screen time, and providers want to offer an environment that nurtures healthy children.
- Sugary drinks like sports drinks, fruit drinks with added sugar, and soda are the largest source of added sugar in the diets of children as young as two. They have no place in our child care facilities. Milk and water should be the top choice for our kids.
- Providers and parent want standards that will help all children grow up at a healthy weight and these standards won't be a burden for providers to implement. They want kids to:
 - Be served more fruits and vegetables, and water or milk instead of sugary drinks
 - Be physically active for at least one to two hours each day
 - Keep time spent watching tv or in front of a computer or tablet to under 30 minutes.

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.

Use This Language	Instead of This Language
✓ Early care and education (preferred); child care	✗ Day care or Early Childhood Education
✓ Standards	✗ Regulations
✓ Consistent (standards)	✗ Appropriate (standards)
✓ Sugary drinks like fruit drinks with added sugar, sports drinks, and soda	✗ SSBs, sugar-sweetened beverages
✓ Describe the types of electronic devices to be limited such as watching tv, time spent in front of a computer or tablet	✗ Screen time
✓ Active play	✗ Physical activity, exercise
✓ Helping children grow up at a healthy weight	✗ Preventing childhood obesity
✓ Eating healthy and being physically active helps prevent diabetes and heart disease.	✗ Eating healthy and being physically active helps prevent childhood obesity.

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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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."