

Don't Sell Us Short™

Tips for Effective Messaging around Junk Food Marketing in Schools

- ✓ Make the connections between targeted advertising (companies aggressively marketing to certain populations) and its effect on children's junk food choices, ultimately causing health problems.
- ✓ Stress that schools are a place of learning, not a place for promoting junk food.
- ✓ Emphasize that there are healthy ways to fundraise that are also profitable.
- ✓ Provide specific examples whenever possible; most parents are unaware of the marketing happening in their school until shown a clear example.
- ✓ Provide examples of in-school marketing including fast food coupons as incentives for reading or vending machines wrapped in advertisements for soda.

Junk Food Marketing in Schools Messages (*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

- ★ Junk food is no longer sold in schools and that is good for kids. But why are we still letting companies advertise these items? If it can't be sold in school, then it shouldn't be promoted in school.
- Schools are places of learning and should be safe havens where students go to prepare for the future. Kids spend most of their time in schools and they should not be a place for promoting junk food.
- Parents work hard to provide healthy food at home and they need those efforts to be reinforced when their kids are at school.
- Young kids can't differentiate between advertising messages and other messages they receive about health and nutrition while they are at school. Schools need to be places where kids receive a consistent set of messages about healthy eating.
- Companies that sell junk food spend millions of dollars marketing to kids because they know it works. Kids ask for things that are advertised to them. And, we see the outcome – children with chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease.
- Many schools put time and resources into teaching kids about nutrition. School meals and snacks are getting healthier, and some schools have gardens where kids help grow fruits and vegetables. When junk food is marketed all over school grounds, it undermines all this positive work and interferes with good health and academic success.
- Many school districts are finding ways to fundraise that are healthy and profitable. They are selling fruit, jewelry, holiday items, discount cards and toys, hosting walk-a-thons, and recycling printer cartridges. Schools don't have to market junk food to make ends meet.

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 junk food marketing in schools. 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
✓ Junk food marketing	✗ Unhealthy food and beverage marketing
✓ Help kids grow up at a healthy weight	✗ Prevent 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."