

Serve Kids Better™

Tips for Effective Kids' Restaurant Meals Messaging

- ✓ People want restaurants to provide healthy options for kids so that parents have good choices. Framing the issue in terms of government regulation can turn people away. Be sure to discuss it as a way to increase choice for parents.
- ✓ Emphasize that restaurants should work on making all components of kids' meals healthier, not just drinks.
- ✓ Messages that include surprising information based in facts and common-sense reasoning (i.e. six is the average age of a child ordering from the children's menu and 97 percent of children's meals are unhealthy) work best to convince voters/parents of the importance of increasing healthy food options on children's menus.
- ✓ In order to address arguments that kids' meals would be difficult for restaurants to improve, emphasize that some restaurants are already making changes and give examples.

Kids' Restaurant Meals Messages (*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

- ★ **Our lives are busy, and more and more, we're grabbing a meal on the run or eating out. That's why it's so important that restaurants offer healthy food and beverage options—especially for children.**
 - The majority of children's meals at the most popular restaurants are unhealthy. They are packed with calories, salt, and fat. And, children consume almost twice as many calories at restaurants compared to a typical meal at home.
 - Parents simply want more healthy choices for kids and to cut down on those familiar requests for junk food and sugary drinks.
- To help parents, restaurants can make sure kids' meals are healthier. One easy way to get this started is to offer water or milk as the drink with kids' meals. They can also offer more fruit, vegetables, or whole grains and make sure the meals are not too high in calories, especially from excess fat and salt. The goal is to help kids see these healthy options as the norm, not the exception.
- Soda is too high in sugar for kids, yet it is usually the beverage served with children's meals. Drinking sodas and other sugary drinks, like energy and sports drinks, is associated with chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes. Milk or water should be the beverage served with children's meals.

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 kids' restaurant meals. 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
✓ Choices and options	✗ Restrictions, mandates, bans, and regulations
✓ Sugary drinks like sports drinks, fruit drinks, energy drinks or soda; drinks with added sugar	✗ Sugar-sweetened beverages or SSBs
✓ Healthy standards	✗ Minimum nutrition requirements, banning sugary drinks
✓ 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."