

# Putting the Messages Into Practice

The core nutrition messages are designed for use in the Federal nutrition assistance programs and to reach and resonate with low-income mothers and 8- to 10-year-old children. The messages and their supporting content are tools that can enhance theory-based interventions that:

- Address the key behavioral outcomes on page 3,
- Use motivators and reinforcements that are personally relevant to the target audience,
- Employ multiple channels of communication,
- Actively engage the participant, and
- Provide multiple exposures to the messages.

This section of *Maximizing the Message* suggests ways you can integrate the messages and supporting content into ongoing nutrition education activities. We've also included strategies for incorporating the messages into communication channels that were identified through nutrition education research, focus group discussions with moms and kids, and feedback from program stakeholders.

## **Connecting the Messages to Programs**

The core nutrition messages support national nutrition education goals and nutrition assistance program policies such as the Food

Stamp Nutrition Education Guiding Principles, Child Nutrition School Wellness Policies, WIC Program Nutrition Education Guidance and WIC's Revitalizing Quality Nutrition Services process.

Nutrition education implemented through the nutrition assistance programs utilizes a variety of educational approaches, including facilitated/participatory group discussions, anticipatory guidance, motivational interviewing, "hands-on" classes, social marketing campaigns, Web-based approaches, etc. With a little planning, you can easily incorporate the core nutrition messages into these efforts. Think of the core nutrition messages as building blocks that can enhance and add new vitality to your nutrition education efforts targeting low-income mothers and 8- to 10-year-old children.

## **Consider Cultural Relevance**

When implementing the messages, consider cultural relevance and make adjustments as needed to make them appropriate for the population you serve. For instance, if a large portion of the population has religious beliefs or practices that preclude serving milk/milk products with certain foods at meals, supporting content can be modified to offer other approaches (e.g., serving milk at snack time instead of dinner). It will be important to test any modifications with the audience(s) to ensure they are clear and have the intended effect.

The core nutrition messages and supporting content were tested with Hispanic and non-Hispanic White and African American mothers and children who spoke English. If you wish to use the messages and content with other racial/ethnic groups or in other languages, consider conducting additional formative research to ensure that the messages are relevant, understood, and motivating to your audience. For example, the core message that encourages moms to “Let your kids be produce pickers” tested very well with moms in our focus groups. This message was overwhelmingly preferred in six groups and did not receive any negative comments from moms. Still, if your target audience is primarily migrant farm workers, we suggest you get feedback from these moms before using this message with them.

### **Incorporating the Messages Into Facilitated Group Discussions and Interactive Classes**

You can use the core messages and related supporting content in a variety of group education settings. Here are six easy ways:

#### **1. Host mom “support” groups at WIC clinics, childcare centers, libraries, and other places that low-income moms of preschoolers frequent in your community.**

Facilitate discussions on message concepts such as role modeling, eating together as a family, cooking with preschool-age children, and letting kids serve themselves at meals. Consider using the mom’s story about role modeling fruit and vegetable consumption as a starting point for the discussion (Appendix A, page 28). Or ask moms about ways they are teaching their kids to become independent. Encourage moms to talk about things their children might learn at mealtimes. Hearing from other moms can empower and give less experienced moms confidence to put the behaviors into practice. Provide a take-home handout featuring the core nutrition message and supporting content to reinforce the discussion.

**2. Provide opportunities for moms and elementary school-age kids to be “produce pickers.”** Hold events at schools, faith-based institutions, community gardens, or grocery stores that allow moms and kids to select and taste different fruits and vegetables. Emphasize how letting kids select fruits and veggies may increase their willingness to eat them. Also, highlight how the activity may help kids build new skills (e.g., kids learn how to grocery shop, identify fruits and vegetables of different colors, etc.). Follow up on your event with “Fruit or Vegetable of the Month” activities that focus on a fruit or vegetable that is in season and affordable for low-income families in your community. Suggest fun ways to inspire kids to choose frozen and canned fruits and vegetables as well.

**3. Make your class dip-a-licious!** Prepare and allow mothers (and their elementary school-age kids, if possible) to sample the dip recipes included in the supporting content for mothers of elementary school-age children (Appendix C, page 32). A chance to see how easy recipes are to prepare and how good they taste will enhance skill building and increase the likelihood that moms will prepare these recipes at home. Include a discussion about how moms can make veggies and small containers of dip easy for their children to “reach” for an afternoon snack. Giving the dip a fun name such as “swamp slime” or one related to the rocket ship or super hero theme can also help encourage kids to eat it (and the veggies that go with it). Invite moms to suggest fun names for the dips.

**4. Expand a “Loving Your Family: Feeding Their Future” class series.** Add a discussion about ways to make fruits and vegetables accessible to elementary kids as after-school snacks. Encourage moms to set goals and have them share “success” stories during the next class. *Loving Your Family*...discussion guides are available at <http://snap.nal.usda.gov>.

### **5. Encourage moms to keep milk on the table.**

Facilitate discussions with moms of elementary school-age children on kids' continued need for low-fat and fat-free milk and milk products. Specifically discuss serving low-fat or fat-free milk at dinner and limiting other beverage options. In our focus groups, few children drank milk at dinner. For those who did, milk was the only beverage option their parents provided. Hold a "milk taste challenge" to help overcome perceived taste barriers to consuming fat-free and low-fat milk. Provide parents with activity sheets for their children that are based on the core message for kids.

**6. Use core nutrition messages with MyPyramid for Kids classroom materials on fruits and vegetables.** These classroom materials are available at <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/resources/mypyramidclassroom.html>. For the Vegetable Ad Campaign Activity included in Level 2, Lesson 3, ask children to create an ad campaign for a vegetable based upon the super hero, rocket ship or "Eat smart to play hard" theme. Have students use their creativity to create a poster and perhaps a TV ad—a jingle, a skit—that they can perform for the class.

## **Using the Messages in Counseling Sessions**

**Motivational Interviewing.** Motivational interviewing is a counseling method that you can use to influence a mom's motivation to change her behavior.<sup>54</sup> Use the focus group findings presented in this guide to help you understand some of the challenges moms face when trying to change behaviors related to child feeding practices. This may help you in developing open-ended questions that identify personal challenges experienced by moms. It can also help you connect with moms during your counseling sessions. You can also use the core messages and supporting content as a reference on which to base feedback and choices for moms who are interested in ways to

overcome child feeding problems. For instance, if a mom expresses a desire for ways to help her child eat more fruits and vegetables, you could ask her permission to share some of the strategies provided in the supporting content on role modeling. For more information on motivational interviewing, see the WIC Learning Online module on Motivational Interviewing under the Counseling Skills at [http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/WIC\\_Learning\\_Online/index.html](http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/WIC_Learning_Online/index.html).

**Anticipatory Guidance.** Anticipatory guidance can help moms prepare for expected physical, social, and behavioral changes during their children's current and approaching age of development.<sup>55</sup> You can share the core messages and supporting content with mothers to help them identify ways to help their children develop healthy eating habits. The messages address several hallmarks of preschoolers' development, including their reluctance to try new foods, desire to "do it on their own," and development of motor skills. Work with moms to identify strategies and set goals for eating together, introducing new foods, and eating fruits and vegetables.

**Counseling on Food Benefits.** When discussing changes to the WIC food package with participants, share how fat-free and low-fat milk have the "same nutrition but less fat" than whole milk. In our focus groups most moms did not understand the differences among fat-free, low-fat, reduced-fat, or whole milk (other than perceived taste differences and an assumption that lower fat milk was less nutritious). Moms were interested in having more information on this topic.

### **Enhancing or Creating a Social Marketing Campaign Featuring the Core Messages**

Social marketing involves the selection of a narrowly defined target audience and involving them in the formative stages of your campaign. The focus groups conducted for the development of the core nutrition messages

can contribute to this phase of your campaign development. You can use this research and the resulting messages and supporting content to:

- Refresh current fruit and vegetable or milk/ milk product promotion campaigns by incorporating core nutrition messages.
- Create a new social marketing campaign around one or more of the messages and use the related message supporting content found in the Appendices.
- Collaborate with colleagues in other nutrition programs and/or partners to get even better results.

### **Collaborating With Others To Maximize Message Impact**

Collaborating with others in your community to promote the core messages can increase message exposure. This includes working with other nutrition education providers serving low-income mothers or kids, such as the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). Other intermediaries, or third parties, that have connections to the same target audience can also be valuable partners. Consider collaborating with:

- Coordinators and volunteers of food banks and pantries and soup kitchens
- Pediatricians
- Teachers, principals, nurses, foodservice staff, and school wellness councils that work with schools where many kids receive free or reduced-priced lunches
- Coordinators of afterschool programs serving low-income children
- Childcare providers and Head Start teachers;
- Religious leaders and members of faith-based institutions working with low-income neighborhoods
- Managers of grocery stores and farmers' markets where SNAP and WIC participants shop

- Community garden coordinators
- Grantees and coordinators of programs that are funded to implement environmental changes that make it easier for mothers and children to make healthy food choices

Collaborating with others can increase access to the target audience, create synergy, and expand the credibility of your activities. These core nutrition messages are an opportunity to work with existing partners and to engage new ones.

- Share the messages with potential partners; explain their purpose, audience, and potential uses.
- Provide details on how you will use the messages and content in the community and offer suggestions on how you can work together.
- Share the benefits of collaboration and offer specific ways organizations and individuals can participate as full partners or as supporters, such as by:
  - Featuring articles that communicate the messages in community newsletters;
  - Including messages in educational activities for children and parents;
  - Adding messages and related content to a Web site and/or linking to the State or national Web site with information about messages; and
  - Disseminating materials conveying the messages at events.
- Conduct a seminar or training for intermediaries to acquaint them with the messages. After the presentation, discuss the messages and supporting content in small groups and brainstorm ideas for using the messages, including opportunities and barriers. Have the entire group rate and rank ideas and form a workgroup to outline ways to implement the top-ranked idea.