

Head Start and Early Head Start

Tips for Effective Head Start and Early Head Start Messaging

- ✓ Understand your audience's experience. Most people are familiar with and feel positively about Head Start, and nearly 1 in 3 have a direct connection to the program. Awareness and experience with Early Head Start is lower, but those who know about it, like it. The vast majority of people feel the programs are important, and support increases after people learn more about them. Be prepared to provide information on the benefits and eligibility for these programs.
- ✓ Focus on the importance of the first few years of a child's life and how these programs set children on the right path by supporting brain development and physical, mental, and emotional health.
- ✓ Emphasize the long-term benefits of these programs for children and the broader community.
- ✓ Stress that there are too many families with low incomes that still cannot access these programs.
- ✓ Select the right messengers. Teachers, other school officials, and child care providers are the most trusted messengers for Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- ✓ Understand opposition to expanding these programs, but don't mention them proactively. People have concerns about support going beyond the families most in need; a lack of accountability and oversight of providers; and the cost of the programs to taxpayers.

Head Start and Early Head Start Messages (*Use key messages consistently and repeatedly)

- ★ ***Head Start and Early Head Start programs help kids develop during the important first few years of their lives when their brains are growing the most.***
 - The more that young children can be in healthy and supportive learning environments, the more likely they will be emotionally, mentally and physically healthy and able to reach their full potential.
 - Head Start and Early Head Start programs set children on a positive path in life. The programs help kids prepare for school so they don't start behind their peers.
 - To reach their full potential, all kids, no matter where they live or their family's income, should have access to early learning opportunities.
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide a safe and caring environment for children when their parents are working or going to school, and provide supports to families to increase success.
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs have long-term educational benefits. Children who participate in these programs are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college.
- The community and businesses benefit from parents who are able to work while their children attend Head Start and Early Head Start programs and from children who are more likely to succeed because they started school at the same level as their peers and are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college.

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 Head Start and Early Head Start. 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>
✓ Head Start and Early Head Start	✗ Early Head Start and Head Start
✓ Families who are struggling, families with low incomes	✗ Neediest families, poor families, low-income families
✓ Standards	✗ Regulations
✓ Early care and education (preferred), child care	✗ Day care or Early Childhood Education
✓ Helping children grow up at a healthy weight	✗ Preventing 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."