

VI. Picking Your Communication Outlets and Methods

Research indicates that using multiple delivery points, as well as a variety of communication tools and approaches to disseminate consistent messages to the individual, family, and community, increases the likelihood of success.⁶² These methods increase the audience's exposure to the messages and the opportunity to engage them at critical decision points. Therefore, it is important to know where to reach moms and to understand communication methods that engage them. Ideally, selected channels should enable you to reach a high percentage of the target audiences repeatedly during a given period of time. Use of multiple channels also exposes mothers to messages using different methods in a variety of environments and at different times.

Learning About Your Audience/Community

Audience research and community assessment can provide insights on how to reach low-income mothers, such as where they live, work, shop, get services, and spend free time; what nutrition programs they participate in; and how they like to receive information.

Federal nutrition assistance program data can provide valuable information, such as authorized WIC and SNAP stores with high average monthly benefit redemptions, program

sites serving large numbers of moms, schools with high percentages of kids receiving free meals, and childcare and after-school programs participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Nutrition assistance programs may also conduct consumer surveys to get feedback on services. These may be useful in your planning, providing information on things such as Internet access, shopping habits and preferences about ways to receive information. There may also be other State and local surveys conducted in your community that include useful data about low-income moms and kids.

National surveillance data may also be useful. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (<http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/>) provides State-specific data about health-related behaviors. The United States Census Bureau provides demographic data such as age, gender, household size, and language spoken at home (<http://www.census.gov/>).

Local nutrition educators are also valuable sources of information. They may know, or they can ask, where moms go for health information, the types of media they like, etc. Learn the primary sources of news and health information for moms (e.g., Web sites, newspapers, etc.).

Consider the types of transportation used. Could you reach moms with information in bus shelters and subway stations? Determine if their children participate in afterschool programs and, if so, where? These locations may be good sites for reaching kids and their moms.

National consumer marketing data sources can be helpful in learning more about how to reach moms and kids. For example, data show that mothers living in poverty consider professionals, family and friends, and the Internet as their top health information channels.⁶³ These moms also used social media, newspapers, and magazines as sources of health information.⁶³

Channels To Communicate the Messages

To support and reinforce nutrition education activities, educators use an assortment of materials, including consumer pamphlets, handouts, recipes, posters, activity sheets, school menus, newsletters, Web-based instruction, public service announcements and/or paid ads on television or radio, billboards, bus wraps, articles in community or religious bulletins, reinforcement items, and more.

Each approach and communication method has its benefits and constraints. Make sure that the resources fit the activities and channels you use and that the costs are both affordable and allowable. Use your knowledge of the population and what works with them to guide your decisions. Program funding and guidance vary and may affect which channels you can use to reach participants. Consider the guidance from your funding agency in making final decisions.

If you plan to develop new materials, consider working with other programs and stakeholders. Partners bring expertise and resources that can result in a more comprehensive effort reaching mothers, children, and the community in a way that is more likely to get results.

Using Print Materials

Brochures, posters, handouts, and other print materials are commonly used to reinforce adult counseling and educational sessions. The use of narratives is also increasing as a motivational tool. Storytelling may support health behavior change, in part, through modeling, engagement, and normative beliefs.⁶⁴ Your choice of format will depend upon what you learned from moms about how they like to receive information, what has been effective in the past, and your budget. Consider adapting or modifying your existing nutrition education materials to include the core messages, especially if your materials already focus on one or more of the behaviors addressed by the core messages. Whether incorporating the core nutrition messages into existing communication activities or using them in new materials to support a campaign, it is important to communicate the information in a way that is consistent, accurate, easy to understand, appealing, and relevant to your audience. Test the material with the target audience and get input from intermediaries during development.



Virginia SNAP-ED

Ten Important Tips for Designing Print Materials for Moms:

1. The core nutrition messages contain the “emotional hook” for moms. Feature a message with a compelling photo prominently (e.g., on the front of a brochure) to entice moms to read more. Include relevant information on how to achieve the goal and explain the “pay-off” for moms. For example, Virginia’s SNAP-Ed team developed calendars that coupled the messages with eye-catching photos and low-cost, easy, and tasty recipes to encourage more healthful eating among their clients (see above photo).
2. Include interactive elements in brochures and handouts, such as an area for mothers to record the goal they will strive to achieve or an assessment tool, such as the “Give It a Try” table included in the whole-grain material on “How to tell if it is a whole grain”).
3. Emphasize information with bolding, arrows, boxes, or circles instead of all capital letters.
4. Make your material easier to read by using short bulleted lists (as done with the supporting content included in Appendixes), short sentences, and a serif font.
5. Use left-justified and right-ragged margins.
6. Limit the amount of content provided. Focus on action-oriented tips and strategies that support the message and resonate best with moms.
7. Use attractive designs with similar color themes, fonts, and types of images (e.g., illustrations versus photographs, etc.) for a consistent look.
8. Use photographs or realistic line drawings that support the message and allow the target audience to “see themselves” practicing the behaviors. Images and photos play an important role in attracting consumers’ attention and “inviting” them

in to take a closer look. Test photos and graphics with your audience to make sure they are appropriate and motivational.

9. Keep cultural relevance in mind. Test materials with your target audience.
10. Include a source to contact for more information.

Using Print Materials To Reach Kids

While many of the tips above apply to materials for kids, there are differences. Content needs to be sequential, developmentally appropriate, behaviorally focused, and interactive.^{55,65,66}

Activity sheets, interactive stories, self-assessments, and other resources that get kids actively involved and allow them to practice simple cognitive and behavior skills are engaging and support behavior change. Making materials fun and challenging can also help capture kids’ attention and stimulate their motivation to learn.⁵⁶⁻⁵⁹

Seven Tips for Designing Print Materials for Elementary School-Age Children:

1. Keep materials simple with direct messages.
2. Integrate the theme of the message (e.g., “Eat smart to play hard”) in the material design to capture kids’ attention and motivate them to learn.
3. Conduct formative research periodically to make sure messages and materials are still appealing to kids. What children perceive as “cool” changes over time.
4. Provide concrete ideas rather than abstract concepts (e.g., focus on specific foods to eat rather than nutrients).
5. Include a parental component. Provide either complementary take-home materials for moms or include activities that kids can do with their moms.
6. Use engaging pictures. In our focus groups, kids said that they wanted “action-oriented” images. For example, kids wanted images

of a super hero flying through the air or children playing a sport (“playing hard”) such as soccer or baseball.

7. Include interactive components such as puzzles, challenges, and games.

Using Technology To Reach Moms and Kids

Many of the moms in our focus groups reported using the Internet as a primary source of information on nutrition and health. Among households with incomes below \$30,000, 62 percent of adults use the Internet.⁶⁷ Survey data show that 79.7 percent of all children age 3-17 live in a household with Internet use, and 50.2 percent of individuals with household annual incomes less than \$25,000 live in homes where the Internet is used.⁶⁸ Children who do not have Internet access at home may have it at school.⁶⁹ Overall, kids 9 to 11 years old now use computers and the Internet to play games, send e-mail, and even do homework.⁷⁰

Increased access to the Internet makes it possible to reach more people more often with nutrition messages and related tips/advice. Some studies have shown that nutrition education delivered in a computer game format can significantly improve nutrition knowledge and dietary behavior among school-age children.^{71,56} Depending on resources, the following online tools can be used to deliver core messages and tips/advice in interactive and engaging formats:

- **Reach moms through Web sites and e-mail.** Consider ways you are already using the Web to communicate with moms and kids. Are there areas where you can insert these messages? For example:
 - E-mails and other electronic communications can include short articles that convey a message and tips from the supporting content. (For examples, see “Training Material and Resources” on the core message Web page.)

- Use e-newsletters to provide moms with ideas for involving children in meal preparation using the related messages, or share a Dip-a-licious recipe as a “topic of the month.” Embed the milk, whole grains, and child-feeding rollover widgets onto your Web site to reinforce ongoing education activities (see appendix D for description).

- **Show videos on milk, whole grains, and child feeding in waiting rooms and group sessions** to introduce and reinforce discussions. Include the link to the videos on handouts for self-paced learning at home (see appendix D for description of videos).
- **Display messages digitally.** Use digital frames, computer monitors, message boards, and digital advertising displays to convey the core messages and related tips in waiting rooms, subway tunnels, cafeterias, and more.
- **Teach through play.** Kids can learn while having fun with the Track & Field Fuel Up Challenge. This online game engages kids while teaching them to make healthier food choices that include low-fat milk, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. See description in appendix D. Include the link to the flash-based game on your Web site.
- **Use social media to draw moms to your online resources and key messages,** such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and outlets that reach specific ethnic and racial groups. Examples of blogs, Twitter messages, and Facebook posts are on the Training and Resource page at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition>.

Formative research with your audience can tell you more about moms’ and kids’ use of technology and the factors associated with using it for message delivery (e.g., use of high-speed Internet access,⁷² frequency of interruptions in service, etc.).