

Create messages that resonate with your community of child care professionals

Our three main messages are based on focus groups we conducted in six states. Because they're research-based they should be broadly useful, but no message is universal. When creating messages for your population, do some research—discussions with local allies, or even polling or focus groups—to make sure you use terms that resonate with your community of child care professionals.

To create our messages, we used Spitfire Strategy's approach for building messages.¹ Below, we'll walk you through our message creation process, and you can build your own message as you go!

1 State your value:

Start by talking about values that you and your audience share. The values implicit in our messages are the importance of the health and safety of the children, as well as the significance and responsibility of the teachers/providers.

Values that we used and that resonated with most groups were:

- ▶ Children rely on teachers/providers to learn healthy habits
- ▶ Teachers/providers make a big difference in the lives of the children they care for
- ▶ Healthy eating, active play and limited screen time are important for children's development

Use this space to state your value(s):



¹ Adapted from Spitfire Communication Smart Chart: <http://smartchart.org/about.php>

2 Overcome the barrier(s)

Our barrier is that child care has a lot of rules, and it's hard to get teachers/providers to want more rules. They're already busy and have to remember so many things. We tried to overcome that barrier by appealing to the idea of equity and fairness, and by focusing on the benefit for the child, not the impact of the new standards on the teacher/provider.

For example: many child care professionals think that there is a special skill set they have to learn to do active play activities with toddlers—but really, they're probably already leading them. The barrier is that the professional does not believe they have the knowledge needed to meet the standard.

The overcoming barrier statement would remind them that they have the skills we're looking for.

Overcoming barrier statement: You already have what it takes to help toddlers be active—you help them climb, run and jump and push all day long.

- ▶ Name your biggest barrier:

- ▶ Without naming the barrier, think of a statement that helps the listener move past the barrier:

3 Name the solution—call to action

Our solution is to recommend that child care settings have standards that help make sure all children have access to healthy food and active play, and have limited access to screen time.

We did not use words like require, dictate, govern, rules, regulations. We ended up saying "Standards that incorporate one hour of active play with you and their friends help kids have fun and stay healthy."

We also heard that phrases or words like: food experiences, incorporate, active play is fun, gives opportunity, guided experiences or guided interactions (with technology/screen time) resonated with our intended audience. They illustrate the solution without feeling overbearing to your audience.

- ▶ Write your call to action—what do you want the listener to do or think, based on your message?

4 State your vision and echo your values

Our vision is that child care settings will help children develop healthy eating, movement and screen habits that help them lead the healthiest lives possible. This echoes our values because we believe providers are important role models that can help children develop healthy eating, movement, and screen time habits. Following our example through, the ultimate vision there is that "...kids have fun and stay healthy."

- ▶ So, keeping your values in mind, state your vision:

- ▶ Once you have all of these pieces, put them together and tidy it up:

Voila—you have a message!

It will take a few drafts to get it right, so keep working on it. If you'd like to dig deeper into the message building process, we encourage you to use [Spitfire's Smart Chart 3.0](#).

In addition to the messaging we have developed, [research conducted by Voices for Healthy Kids](#), a joint initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the American Heart Association, provides a handy list of words to use when creating messages about healthy eating, active play, and screen time standards. Be sure to use them when developing your messages.