

Building support for healthy standards among child care providers

Child care professionals want to do what is best for children. Setting consistent standards for nutrition, physical activity, and screen time in child care is one way to ensure all child care settings can help children grow up healthy. Messaging can be an effective method of sharing information and encouraging healthy behaviors.

To develop messages that would increase support for strong, consistent standards, Child Care Aware® of America conducted focus groups with child care professionals (teachers and providers) in six states. The goal of this work was to develop messages that would: 1) resonate with child care providers by stressing the important role they play in children's healthy lifestyle, 2) motivate providers to implement the messages in their programs, and 3) also motivate providers to support statewide standards on nutrition, active play and screen time.

Overall, the majority of our focus group participants agreed that:

- ✓ Teachers and providers play an important role in helping children learn healthy habits; having messages that acknowledge they are important makes them feel valued. Participants noted that messaging is very important for other providers who may not be as knowledgeable or experienced as they are.
- ✓ Active play is important, helps children build healthy habits, and can potentially lead to improved focus and attention during other activities. The latter was a benefit that we were not messaging for, but that participants believe is important as well.
- ✓ Overall, most children have too much screen time. Teachers and providers felt that, if there is screen time in child care, it should be supervised, related to the curriculum, and time-limited.
- ✓ Health standards are important in making sure all children have access to healthy food and opportunities for active play.



We incorporated the feedback from all six groups to develop messages for use nationwide.

Key Messages



Nutrition:

You are important—because kids are with you most of the day, the food experiences you share can influence what they want to eat. Nutrition standards in child care make sure that all children have the opportunity to develop healthy eating habits.



Active Play:

You are important—you help children learn healthy habits they'll keep through their lives. Standards that incorporate one hour of active play with you and their friends help kids have fun and stay healthy.



Screen Time:

You help children balance their day with many activities. Technology can be a great teaching tool, but time spent using tablets, computers, TVs or smart phones should be limited and used appropriately. Standards help children learn how to be smart with screen time.

Child care and workforce advocates: You can use these messages to increase support for healthier standards among child care professionals in your state. Child care program administrators and owner/operators: Use these messages with your staff to encourage buy-in or support for implementing these policies in your program.

Overall, the idea of developing messages on nutrition, active play and screen time, targeted to providers, resonated with all focus group participants. The majority of participants were excited to have messages that highlight areas where they actively engage children in developing healthy behaviors. Based on input from focus group participants, such messages are likely to be implemented in child care settings and would be highly beneficial to child care professionals.

We found some differences in teacher and provider responses, based on geography, which are described further in the state briefs. Responses differed to certain aspects of the messages—specifically, regarding the terms “provider” and “active play.” Also, the message that some screen time is good triggered varying responses based on geographic region and on whether the state already has strong standards on nutrition, active play, and screen time.

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