

Facilitators and barriers to promote healthy eating habits in preschool-aged children at home and in child care.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Core benchmarks for nutrition in child care include that ECE providers and parents communicate or engage with one another to promote healthy eating (HE) habits in young children. **Objective:** To identify facilitators and barriers to Family Child Care Home (FCCH) providers and parents working together to promote HE habits in preschool-aged children. **Study Design, Settings, Participants:** This qualitative, exploratory study implemented the nominal group technique (NGT) method to solicit and rank facilitators and barriers to FCCH providers and parents working together to promote HE in preschool-aged children. Two groups with parents (n=8) and two groups with FCCH providers (n=17) were held from June-October 2018. All participants were Spanish-speaking Latinas. **Measurable Outcome/Analysis:** Participants were asked to generate responses for facilitators and barriers to caregivers working together to promote HE habits in preschool-aged children. Facilitators (36)/ barriers (14) were scored and ranked from most useful to most challenging. Staff trained in qualitative methods coded responses. A content analysis approach was implemented to organize coded responses into FOUR major categories. **Results:** Most useful facilitators for FCCH providers were communication with parents about what foods children consumed at home and supporting parents to make changes and build trust. For parents, most useful facilitators were to work with FCCH providers to create opportunities for HE at home. Most challenging barriers for FCCH providers were perceived home environment factors (e.g., food served, parenting practices), limited parental knowledge of HE for young children, and lack of parental support. The top ranked barrier for parents was lack of time due to work schedules and fast-paced routines. **Conclusion:** Key strategies to promote consistency across the home and ECEs includes trust building and transfer knowledge between caregivers as it relates to feeding young children. Future efforts could consider targeting caregivers' behavioral capability and self-efficacy skills to provide preschoolers with opportunities for HE, and identifying ways to engage parents in brief, yet quality child health and nutrition-related communication.

Background

- The preschool years are a formative period for the development of healthy eating (HE) habits.¹ Yet, preschoolers in the US fail to meet recommendations for healthy eating patterns.²
- Many US children under the age of 6, attend a form of early care and education (ECE) program. This had led to a shared responsibility of feeding young children by caregivers at home and in ECEs. Thus, ECEs are ideal to target preschoolers' eating habits and engage with parents.³
- Family child care homes (FCCHs), are the second most utilized form of ECEs.⁴
- Consistent messaging and opportunities for HE at home and in ECEs is important for shaping positive eating habits in preschool-aged children.^{3,5,6}
- Differences in foods and beverages served to children, and feeding practices used by caregivers at home and in ECEs suggest inconsistent food-related messages across environments.⁶⁻⁸
- Strategies to enhance nutrition-related communication between ECE providers and parents, particularly among families that utilize FCCHs, are needed.⁸

Benchmarks for Nutrition in Child Care³

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics identified 12 benchmarks for nutrition in child care to promote healthy eating in ECEs. Two pertain to parent communication and engagement.

7

Work with parents to encourage healthy foods brought from home.

10

Facilitate nutrition education for children and families.

Objective

- To identify facilitators and barriers to FCCH providers and parents working together to promote HE in preschoolers.

Findings

Sample Characteristics

- FCCH providers (n=17), 100% female.
 - mean(SD) age: 51 (8) years
- Caregiver/Guardian* (n=8), 87% female.
 - mean (SD) age: 44 (13) years
- All Hispanic/Latino, dominant Spanish-speaking, born outside of the US.
 - Living in US ~21 years (FCCH providers)
 - Living in US ~10 years (parents)
- The majority reported the **Dominican Republic** reported as their country of birth.
- Child mean age: 4 years
- Average hours per week child in FCCH: 28 hours.

*relationship to the child was not collected, therefore specific guardian type (e.g., parent, grandparents, or other) cannot be provided.

Generated Group Responses

Prompt 1: What are the best ways FCCH providers and parents can work together to support healthy eating habits in young children?

- 24 responses generated in the FCCH provider group discussions
- 12 responses generated in the parent group discussions.

Prompt 2: What makes it hard for FCCH providers and parents to work together to support healthy eating habits in young children?

- 14 responses were generated in both the FCCH provider and parent group discussions.

- Four themes** were identified to categorize facilitators and barriers to FCCH provider-parent efforts to promote HE in preschoolers.

Methods

Recruitment

- FCCH providers** were recruited via in-person information sessions.
- Parents** were recruited via flyers distributed in FCCHs.



Data Collection

- Two prompts** were used to lead **four group discussions**, using the 5-step Nominal Group Technique (NGT) procedure.⁹
- Two discussions were held with FCCH providers (n=11, n=6) and two with parents (n=4, n=4).
- All were conducted in Spanish, June-October 2018.

Analyses

- Responses were ranked and scored on a (0-5) scale, 5 representing the most useful/challenging facilitator/barrier, 0 representing the least useful/challenging facilitator/barrier.

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Top responses to prompts 1 & 2



Facilitators to working together to promote HE in preschoolers.

FCCH Providers

- Communicate with parents about **what children eat at home.**
- Build trust** by supporting parents to make changes.

1. Social support & consistency

Parents

- Plan with FCCH providers** on feeding children and find ways to create **consistent communication** about child nutrition.
- Provide **opportunities** for HE at home/FCCH to **teach children to eat a variety of foods.**

- Invite parents to mealtimes.

2. Opportunities for Nutrition Education

- Learn** about the FCCH nutrition environment.
- Engage children** in nutrition education and communication.

- Role model** expectations.
- Provide advice on **introducing new foods.**



Barriers to working together to promote HE in preschoolers.

FCCH Providers

- Parents don't have **time.**

3. Limited Communication Opportunities

Parents

- Work** schedules.
- Fast-paced** routines.

- Perceptions, attitudes, beliefs** of parenting practices and children's home environment.

4. Cultural and Contextual Factors

- Difference in languages.**
- Knowledge, skills.**

Conclusion

- Working together to promote HE in early childhood is a shared goal of FCCH providers and parents in this study.
- How FCCH providers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of parenting practices and children's home environment influence parent engagement initiatives warrants further exploration.
- Targeting caregivers' behavioral capability and self-efficacy to provide opportunities for HE at home and in ECEs may address inconsistencies in food-related messages across environments.

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