



FOOD & FUN AFTERSCHOOL, SECOND EDITION PARENT COMMUNICATIONS

UNIT 1: FRUITS AND VEGGIES

ABOUT PARENT ENGAGEMENT

At the Y, we understand that making a difference in children’s health means involving families. Engaging with families in afterschool time is associated with increased family involvement in children’s education and school, improved relationships between parents and children, and improved implementation and outcomes for afterschool programs*.

This tool contains parent engagement activities, a newsletter article, and an email message for you to use with Food & Fun unit 1. These tools are intended to help you connect with and educate parents and caregivers on the key messages in Food & Fun. (You can find all the Food & Fun resources on [Exchange](#).)

It is important to engage parents and caregivers on a regular basis in a variety of ways. Here are some ways that programs have engaged families at afterschool:

- Have a conversation with parents and caregivers at pickup
- Create a bulletin board with the key messages from each Food & Fun unit
- Involve parents and caregivers in daily physical activities and snack time
- Hold regularly scheduled events each month, like a family night

**Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School.* A joint publication of United Way of Massachusetts Bay, Harvard Family Research Project, and Build the Out-Of-School Time Network.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Experiment and be creative—come up with your own ideas or modify the activities below to engage parents and caregivers at your afterschool program!

- **Plan a potluck!** Invite families to participate in a fruit and veggie potluck. Ask adults to bring their favorite fruit or veggie dish to share with other families. Ask them to bring copies of the recipe for other parents so they can make the dish at home.

- **Offer fruits and veggies at pickup.** Put a bowl of fruits or veggies by the sign-out book for parents to grab when they pick up their kids.

NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

Use this article in your organization's publications. Be sure to include the credit "Provided by Harvard School of Public Health Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity and YMCA of the USA."

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES FOR BETTER HEALTH

People sometimes say, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." However, most children (and adults!) in the U.S. are not eating the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Serve a fruit or vegetable at every meal and snack so kids get their five fruits and veggies every day!

This month your child will explore a rainbow of fruits and vegetables in the (*insert program name*) afterschool program.

The key messages for adults are:

- Go for Five! Eat five or more fruits and vegetables (combined) each day.
- Serve a fruit or vegetable with every meal and snack, even if your child doesn't always eat them.
- Involve your child in healthy eating. Ask your child to help choose which fruits and vegetables you buy for the family and pick which you serve with meals.
- Encourage your child to at least "take a bite" of every fruit and vegetable you serve.

The key messages for kids are:

- Go for five! Eat five or more fruits and vegetables (combined) each day.
- Try to eat a fruit or a vegetable with every meal and snack.
- Just take a bite! Don't be afraid to try a new fruit or vegetable—chances are you'll like it.

Our goal is to help children enjoy fruits and vegetables through taste testing and other fun food-related activities.

Fruits and vegetables are important because they provide vitamins, minerals and fiber. A diet high in fruits and vegetables can help kids grow and fight illness. It also protects against heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and some cancers. The fiber and water in fruits and vegetables help you feel full.

How can you get more fruits and vegetables into your family's diet? The key is to make the foods available, and to model healthy habits yourself.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Serve fruits and vegetables with every meal and snack.** Even if your kids don't always eat them, make them an option every time. Don't forget to send them to school for snacks and lunches!
- **Involve your kids.** Get your kids to help in cooking and planning meals. They are more likely to try new foods if they help out!
- **Role model.** Serve and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack. Kids learn good habits from their parents and adult role models!
- **Start early.** Introduce fruits and vegetables to children early in life. Continue serving them often.
- **Be prepared.** Have a supply of cut up, prepared fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator for snack. Store them in clear containers at eye level.
- **Trade up.** Ask for a salad instead of fries when eating out.
- **Don't overdo the juice.** Serving 100% fruit juice doesn't substitute for whole fruit. Limit 100% juice to 4 ounces per day.

Remember, as a parent, you are the most important person for deciding what to serve at each meal. Set a good example by eating and serving fruits and vegetables every day. For more information and great recipe and snack ideas, check out www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/. For more on keeping your family healthy, visit www.ymca.net/healthy-family-home.

[SIDE BAR]

Fruits and veggies make tasty and easy snacks!

- Apple slices and peanut butter
- Cucumber slices, cheese, and whole grain crackers
- Corn tortillas with beans, cheese, and salsa
- Baby carrots and hummus
- Dried fruits like raisins, pineapple, and apricots with nuts and sunflower seeds

EMAIL MESSAGE

Use this sample message to communicate with parents and caregivers by email.

SUBJECT: **Healthy Habits Power Tips: Get your five servings of fruits and veggies!**

Dear *(insert program name)* Parents and Caregivers:

This month your child will explore a rainbow of fruits and vegetables in the *(insert program name)* afterschool program.

The key messages for adults are:

- Go for Five! Eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables (combined) each day.
- Serve a fruit or vegetable with every meal and snack, even if your child doesn't always eat them.
- Involve your child in healthy eating. Ask your child to help choose which fruits and vegetables you buy for the family and pick which you serve with meals.
- Encourage your child to at least "take a bite" of every fruit and vegetable you serve.

The key messages for kids are:

- Go for Five! Eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables (combined) each day.
- Try to eat a fruit or a vegetable with every meal and snack.
- Just take a bite! Don't be afraid to try a new fruit or vegetable—chances are you'll like it.

Our goal is to help children enjoy new fruits and vegetables through taste testing and other fun food-related activities.

You can support this goal by reinforcing the key messages at home, and by following these **Healthy Habits Power Tips:**

- **Serve fruits and vegetables with every meal and snack.** Even if your kids don't always eat them, make them an option every time. Don't forget to send them to school for snacks and lunches!
- **Involve your kids.** Get your kids to help in cooking and planning meals. They are more likely to try new foods if they help out!
- **Role model.** Serve and eat a variety of fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack. Kids learn good habits from their parents and adult role models!
- **Start early.** Introduce fruits and vegetables to children early in life. Continue serving them often.
- **Try canned and frozen and canned fruit and veggies.** They are low in price and easy to prepare. Choose fruit canned in 100% juice and canned vegetables low in salt.

- **Trade up.** Ask for a salad instead of fries when eating out.
- **Don't overdo the juice.** Serving 100% fruit juice doesn't substitute for whole fruit. Limit 100% juice to 4 ounces per day.

Want to learn more? For information on the health benefits of fruits and vegetables, go to www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/vegetables-and-fruits. Click on www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org for fruit and vegetable recipes, games for kids, and health information. For more on keeping your family healthy, visit www.ymca.net/healthy-family-home.