

Topic Area: Undergraduate Education and Dietetic Internship

Abstract Title

Implications of using food as a reward: Public health professionals' perspectives for effective communication strategies

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Abstract

Objective: To gain an understanding of what messages and means of delivery public health professionals (PHPs) believe are most effective to communicate implications of using food as a reward with children aged 0-6.

Methods: A purposive sample of PHPs at Public Health Sudbury & Districts (PHSD), with current or previous work experience with caregivers of children aged 0-6, were recruited through verbal and electronic communication to participate in one of two focus groups in February 2018. A registered dietitian (RD) facilitated the groups using a standardized guide, which included questions related to personal thoughts and feelings towards food rewards, and PHP feedback on potential key messages and communication strategies (e.g. handout, videos). Two dietetic interns recorded group responses both electronically and through written notes. Thematic data analysis was employed with key themes identified and then compared to themes found in the literature.

Results: A total of 21 PHPs working with caregivers of young children participated in the focus groups that were each 30-45 minutes in length. The majority of participants agreed positive role modeling and building healthy relationships, both with food and with others, were the most effective messages to address the implications of using food rewards. Both groups identified a personalized handout was the most effective means to deliver these messages.

Conclusions: The development of a culturally sensitive, personalized handout utilizing best practices in health literacy would effectively support PHPs to communicate the implications of using food as a reward with caregivers of young children. Emphasizing responsive feeding practices such as role modeling, and building healthy relationships with food and others were identified as key messages.

Significance to Dietetics: Discouraging the use of food rewards in young children through effective communication strategies from RDs and other PHPs can promote healthy feeding practices and positive health outcomes.