

Lesson 3.5: Food Advertising

Background (Read before you teach):

In 2009, the fast food industry alone spent \$4.2 billion on advertising through all media (Council on Communications and Media, 2011). Based on the 2010 Nielsen ratings, Latino children and youth (2-17 years) in the US viewed an average of 11.6-12.4 food ads per day, most of which were for fast food restaurants (Fleming-Milici, Harris, Sarda & Schawartz, 2013). Interactive online advertising targets children through games and cartoon characters, encouraging them to ask their parents to buy the foods. Exposure to such food advertising often does result in child requests for those foods and when parents act on those requests, greater consumption of snack and fast foods among children. Parents should also discuss advertising messages and tactics with their children and teenagers. In helping children see that ads are just trying to sell products, parents can explain that buying healthier foods and beverages is better overall for the family's health and budget.

Teaching Tip: This lesson reinforces messages taught in the “Shop with a List” and “Read the food label” If it is not feasible to have a food ad scavenger hunt (see Lesson), simply ask families to recall all the places where they encounter food ads. An alternative activity to the role playing exercise (see Activity) can be to ask the parents to draw their own advertisements for healthy foods. If children are present, they can also draw their own advertisements. Ask the school to display the posters in the cafeteria.

Target Audience: Mexican-origin families with children ages 3 to 8 years

Key Message: Be wary of food advertising: make healthy food and beverage choices.

Objectives: By the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify messages in ads and how they influence our food choices
- Identify ways to handle child requests for advertised foods without buying the food

Materials: dollar bill, items with advertisements (see set-up), paper and pencils, food and other supplies for food demonstration (suggested Sweet Potato Fries)

Handouts: recipes, food ad examples

Set-up: (Optional) Collect a variety of items that have advertisements (preferably for food), such as school notebooks, lunch boxes, toys, baseball caps, t-shirts, newspaper ads, magazine ads, grocery receipts, pencils, keyrings, or napkins. Put these items around the room.

Opening (Anchor): (10 min) Welcome! Review what was covered last time and ask if participants have made changes, based on their goals. Congratulate and encourage them to keep on making changes.

Today, we will be talking about the influence of food advertising and what you can do to encourage your family to make healthy food choices.

To begin the class:

Ask: In 2009, fast food companies spent \$4.2 billion dollars in advertising. (Show dollar bill) If you laid that amount in dollar bills end to end, how many times would it span the Earth? (more than 3 times!) Why do companies spend so much in advertising? (People usually buy brands that are more familiar or highly advertised.)

Lesson (Add): (10 min) Discuss the following points:

- Food ad scavenger hunt: **Say:** Let's take a walk around the room and find examples of advertisements. After looking around, write down as many examples as you can. Include other places where you see food ads. **Ask:** How many different examples of food ads did you find or recall? What is on your list?

Summarize: Advertisements—including food ads—are everywhere. Many are on children's items—toys, school supplies, clothing—but also on TV, radio, internet, newspapers/magazines, billboards, buses.

- **Ask:** Can you recall a food ad that you heard or saw recently? What was the ad for? Why do you remember hearing or seeing it? Did you buy the food?

Ads often appeal to our emotions or try to entertain us. Ads are designed to make us want to buy the food, regardless of whether we need it or had planned to buy it.

Ads try to tell us that we will be happier, prettier, smarter, more popular, more successful, or have more fun if we eat that food.

Activity (Apply): (30 min) While the assistant starts the food demonstration, the educator leads the activity.

(Food Ad Messages) Let's take a closer look at what some food ads are trying to tell us. In pairs or small groups, have participants read the ads and decide what the message is. **Ask:** What is the ad trying to tell us? **Ask:** As adults, we might know these things won't happen just because we buy that food, but what effect do food ads have on our children?

Ad #1 message—Eating this cereal means you are special and not ordinary.

Ad #2 message—Use this product to make a quick and easy meal.

Ad #3 message—Buying this brand is better.

Ad #4 message—Eating chocolate candy will make you feel good.

Ad #5 message—Your family will love you more if you make these cookies.

Ad #6 message—This drink is a quick way to get energy when exercising.

Ad #7 message—Eat more fruit.

Ad #8 message—You deserve to treat yourself.

- (Role Play) **Ask:** How does it feel to refuse your child's request for an unhealthy food?

Let's role play a situation where your child asks to go to a fast food restaurant because he just saw a funny commercial with a superhero on television.

(Some possible solutions: Explain that you don't want to buy foods that are not healthy for him or her and then offer a choice between 2 healthier alternatives; for older children, help them understand that ads try to promise something that isn't possible).

- Food demonstration, tasting and sharing. Pass around the containers, showing the participants any foods that might be new or unfamiliar (for example, low-fat products, whole grain alternatives). Explain step-by-step how the food is prepared. Serve samples for tasting. **Ask:** What are some ways that your children can help prepare this recipe? How can you use it at home? What do you like about the recipe? What would you change?

Closing (Away): (10 min) Pair-up and set specific goals.

What did you learn? Why is this information important to you? Choose a goal to work on this month (week). Try to choose a simple goal that is doable within a week. For example : "The next time I go shopping, I will not buy a food that my family does not need" or "Offer my child two healthier choices as alternatives when requesting advertised food products"

Write your goal in the recipe handout. Ask a friend or family member to support you in reaching your goal. Invite families to share their goals. Find out how much money you save in a month's time!

References and Resources:

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