

Identifying and Clarifying Values and Reason Statements That Promote Effective Food Parenting Practices, Using Intensive Interviews

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Generate and test parents' understanding of values and associated reason statements to encourage effective food parenting practices.

Methods: This study was cross-sectional. Sixteen parents from different ethnic groups (African American, white, and Hispanic) living with their 3- to 5-year-old child were recruited. Interested parents were directed to a Web site, where they provided screening information and informed consent. Two types of telephone interviews were used: semistructured intensive interviews and cognitive interviews.

Results: The most common core values identified in the semistructured interview were religion/spirituality, family, and health, which appeared invariant across parent ethnicity. Parent responses to cognitive interviews enabled rephrasing of statements that were not well understood, the list of values was increased, and reason statements were added to cover the spectrum cited by parents.

Conclusions and Implications: Values and reason statements will be used to tailor intrinsic motivational messages for effective food parenting practices.

Key Words: values, reasons, vegetables, parenting practices, Self-determination Theory (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2011;43:531-535.)

INTRODUCTION

Diets rich in vegetables can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease,^{1,2} diabetes,³ and some cancers.⁴⁻⁶ Children's vegetable consumption is below recommended levels.^{7,8} MyPlate recommends that 2- to 5-year-old children consume 3 servings, or 1 to 1½ cups, of vegetables per day.⁹ However, the 1999 to 2002 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey indicated that 78% of these children were not meeting this recommendation.¹⁰

Parents influence their children's eating habits in many ways, including food parenting practices.¹¹ Parenting practices are parenting behaviors intended to influence their child's behav-

ior in a specific context,¹² such as feeding. Some intervention programs that attempted to engage parents to help promote healthful dietary intake among children showed positive effects in children's vegetable consumption.¹³⁻¹⁷ Programs that teach food parenting practices¹⁸ could be effective in encouraging children to eat more vegetables. A key issue is how to motivate parents to adopt and use effective food parenting practices.

Self-determination Theory¹⁹ posits motivation as the strongest factor driving behavior. Motivation can be intrinsic (for the joy of engaging in the behavior) or extrinsic (to please someone else). Intrinsically motivated behavior tends to be sustained longer than extrinsically motivated behav-

ior, which also requires continued pressure or reinforcement (eg, a prize, good grades) to be sustained.¹⁹ Self-determination Theory further posits that meeting 3 basic psychological needs moves people toward intrinsic motivation: (1) competence (self-efficacy, ability to successfully perform the behavior), (2) autonomy (independence to choose the behavior, control over the behavior), and (3) relatedness (concordance with personal beliefs and deeply held values). When these needs are met, an individual moves toward intrinsic motivation.

Relatedness explains how core values (personal beliefs that guide a person's behavior,²⁰ eg, some people value "being responsible") compel decisions to engage in a behavior. Core values play different roles in people's lives. Individuals make everyday and long-term decisions and establish goals based on their values.²⁰ Core values linked to specific behaviors have been used to successfully promote behavior change.²¹⁻²³ Reasons are statements that relate values to particular behaviors,²⁴ eg, a parent

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who values “being responsible” may reason: “I serve my child vegetables because it shows I am a responsible parent.” Motivational messages to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables were tailored to personal values by using reason statements.²⁵ Motivating parents to develop food parenting skills through motivational messages connected to their values offers promise for improving vegetable consumption in young children. This study identified parents’ core values and associated reasons and evaluated parents’ understanding of these values and associated reasons to encourage their child to eat vegetables.

METHODS

Sample and Recruitment

Participants were recruited via flyers posted throughout the Texas Medical Center in Houston, Texas, online announcements on the Baylor College of Medicine and the Children’s Nutrition Research Center Web sites, and contacts with families listed in the center’s research volunteer database. Inclusionary criteria were being a parent or guardian of a 3- to 5-year-old living in the home and being the primary food caregiver. Exclusionary criteria were the 3- to 5-year-old child having a medical condition that influenced his or her diet. To assess ethnic differences, an ethnically diverse group (African American, Hispanic, and white) was recruited. Interested parents were directed to a Web site, where they provided screening information and online informed consent. Those who agreed to participate completed a survey that asked their ethnicity, sex, child age and sex, household income, highest level of education in household, primary food caregiver, and any disease or condition that affected their child’s food intake patterns. Parents who met the requirements were contacted by staff and invited to participate in one or both interviews. Verbal permission was obtained to record the telephone conversation. In exchange for their participation, parents received \$20 per interview. This study was approved by the Baylor College of Medicine Institutional Review Board.

Procedures

Two types of telephone interviews were used: semistructured intensive interviews (to explore parents’ understanding of the concept of “values” and their self-selection of important values: interview I)²⁶ and cognitive interviews (to test understanding of the items: interview II).²⁷ Interview I included 12 open-ended questions, structured follow-up prompts, and unstructured probes. This article presents only responses to the question, “Tell me what the 3 most important values are for you?” and the follow-up question, “How would your child eating more vegetables help you to achieve the value?” To ensure that parents understood what we were asking, an introduction with the definition of the term *value* was given (Think about the ideas that guide the decisions you make in your life. These ideas are sometimes called “values”...). If participants had trouble with the question, an example was given.

Interview II evaluated comprehension of a preexisting list of values and their reason statements. This involved mailing a list of 10 values and reason statements²⁴ and, by telephone, assessing comprehension and completeness. The list of values was adapted from a list of 30 values and corresponding reason statements used in a serious videogame for children aged 9 to 11 years, reflecting the authors’ judgments about which were most applicable to having children eat vegetables. For interview II, the meaning of *values* was asked (What does the word “values” mean to you?). If the parents did not understand the meaning, then a standard definition was given. All interviews were conducted by trained interviewers between December 2008 and February 2009.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were checked against audiorecordings by interviewers to ensure accuracy and completeness. All interviews were imported to NVivo software (QSR NVivo 8.0, Doncaster, Victoria, Australia, 2008). Responses were identified on the transcripts and classified by question with the inter-

view guide as a framework. Codes were derived as the classification proceeded; for example, under the question, “What does having a healthy child mean to you?” the responses were coded into the following emerging themes: emotionally healing, lack of physical illness, to have a healthful lifestyle, to be well nourished, and importance of having a healthy child. One of the authors conducted the preliminary coding, which was independently reviewed by another coauthor. Discrepancies were resolved by consensus between the 2 coders. Further discrepancies were resolved by consensus among the investigators.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the participants. Sixteen parents met study eligibility criteria and completed the telephone interview. Ten parents completed parts I and II interviews, 5 completed only part I, and 1 completed just part II. For part I, 5 self-identified as African American (all women), 5 as Hispanic (4 women, 1 man), and 5 as non-Hispanic white (4 women, 1 man). For part II, 4 were African American, 3 Hispanic (1 man), 3 white, and 1 female Asian (Table 1).

Part I: Parents’ Values and Reasons to Have Their Child Eat More Vegetables

The most common values were religion/spirituality, family, and health. Other values were education, honesty, and doing the right thing (Table 2). The values identified with more mentions by the parents were invariant across parent ethnicity.

Among parents who reported religion/spirituality as a value, some stated that their child’s eating more vegetables would benefit their child’s body, which should be treated as a temple. For example:

... in the Bible, it says that our bodies are a temple; we are to respect them and use them, as a vehicle to do God’s work, by eating more vegetables ... it keeps your body healthy, shows respect for your body and allows you to carry out that work (white parent).

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