



# Limiting Sugar Sweetened Beverages:

## Focus Group Discussions with Parents of Elementary School-Aged Children

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HOMESTYLES

HEALTHY HOME HEALTHY FAMILY

### Abstract

**Objectives:** To describe parent cognitions and behaviors regarding their children’s intake of sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs).

**Methods:** Focus groups were conducted by trained moderators with English- and Spanish-speaking parents of 6-to-11 year-olds (n=37) in 3 states (FL, NJ, WV) with the goal of informing the development of nutrition education materials about limiting SSBs. Data were continuously coded and content analyzed by 2 trained researchers to identify the point of data saturation, trends in the data, and differences between English- and Spanish-speaking parents.

**Results:** Parents agreed that SSBs are not healthy beverage choices. They felt water and juice were better options for everyday consumption, but that SSBs could be a treat at events or parties. Reasons for limiting SSBs differed slightly, though all parents were concerned about children’s health. English-speaking parents limited SSB intake to control hyperactive behavior, limit caffeine intake, and prevent cavities, whereas Spanish-speaking parents were more concerned with preventing excess weight gain. Parents reported that challenges to limiting SSBs included the intake of key influencers (family members or peers) and the availability of SSBs at home and school. Some strategies parents used to decrease SSB intake included not purchasing SSBs, using special “fun” cups for water, diluting juice with water, replacing SSBs with milk or water, and talking with their kids about SSBs’ effects on health. Parents agreed that children imitate parents’ beverage intake, whether parents are drinking SSBs or healthier beverages like water. To prevent children from observing parents drinking SSBs and requesting them, some English-speaking parents reported that they hide their SSB intake from their kids. Parents agreed that as their children have gotten older, it had become more difficult to limit their SSB intake due to increased exposure to SSBs during events or at school and influences from peers or family members.

**Conclusions:** Parents of elementary school-age kids believe that it is important to limit SSB intake, have found some effective strategies to limit SSB intake, acknowledge that limiting SSB has become more difficult as their children get older, and could benefit from a larger repertoire of strategies for controlling children’s SSB intake.

### Methods

#### Sample

- Parents of children 6-11 years old
- English and Spanish speaking

#### Data Collection

- Moderator led focus groups (n=37)
- Brief self-report survey (n=185)
- 3 states: NJ, WV, FL

#### Data Analysis

- Constant comparison to identify the point of data saturation
- Data coded to identify themes and trends



“[I do] not keep the sugary beverages in the house, I only keep milk and water, sometimes orange juice.”

“My kid notices every time I have a coke. He keeps track. The next time he wants one, he reminds me that I had it, so he can get one too.”



“As they get older, they like to negotiate... I have to artfully and skillfully plan out responses [to requests for SSBs] to my 8- and 6-year-olds.”

### Results

Parents usually drank 1.85±2.38SD SSBs weekly

#### Parents felt

- SSBs are unhealthy and should be limited
- Water, juice, and milk are good alternatives to soda
- SSB effects that concerned English-speakers were hyperactivity, caffeine intake, and cavities
- SSB effects that concerned Spanish-speakers were excess weight gain

#### Barriers to limiting children’s SSB intake were

- Key influencers (family members or peers)
- Ready availability/accessibility to SSB

#### Parents overcame barriers to limiting SSB by

- Not purchasing soda
- Reserving a special cup for water
- Talking with their kids about the effects of SSBs on health
- Replacing soda with milk or water
- Diluting juice with water

#### Parents’ advice to others to control children’s SSB intake

- Don’t keep soda in the house
- Dilute juice
- Have milk/water be the main options
- Be firm: Set SSB intake rules and enforce them
- Talk with kids about the effects of SSBs on health

#### Changes in kids’ SSB intake now that they are in elementary school

- Increased exposure to SSBs at events or school
- Greater influence of peers and family members on children’s intake

### Strengths and Limitations

#### Strengths

- Survey in English or Spanish
- Focus groups were led by trained moderators using scripted a moderator’s guide
- Geographic diversity (NJ, FL, WV)

#### Limitations

- Low representation of fathers
- Results based on participant self-report

### Conclusions

- Parents of elementary-aged kids believe that SSBs are unhealthy beverage choices for themselves and their children.
- Strategies parents use to limit children’s SSB intake include decreasing availability/accessibility, offering healthier options (milk/water/juice), reserving fun cups for healthier drink options and talking with their kids about the effects of SSBs.
- Parents also felt it was important that they model healthy drinking behaviors in front of their children.

Participant Characteristics	n	%
<b>Language</b>		
English	24	65
Spanish	13	35
<b>State</b>		
Florida	13	35
New Jersey	12	32
West Virginia	12	32
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	1	2
Female	36	97
<b>Education</b>		
High school or less	7	19
Some college	9	24
Baccalaureate degree or higher	21	57
<b>Race</b>		
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	15	41
White	20	54
Other	2	5

“Use it [soda] like a treat, your child doesn’t eat a candy bar everyday. People have the mindset as soda is a beverage, which it is, but some serve it with meals. Try serving water or juice with a meal and really treat the soda like a special treat.”



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