Strategies for Disseminating the HomeStyles Challenge via Preschools: Qualitative Phone Interviews with Preschool Directors

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Abstract

Objective: Disseminating at-home, parent-directed childhood obesity prevention programs, like the HomeStyles Challenge (HC), presents numerous challenges. This study aimed to identify strategies to encourage preschool directors and families to participate in the HC.

Methods: Trained researchers conducted 2 rounds of interviews with preschool directors (n=9) from 3 states (FL, NJ, WV).

Results: Round 1 of interviews gathered insight into how best to build interest in the HC among preschools and parents. Directors stressed the value of fully informing staff about the HC, including its goals, logistics, and congruence with the preschool’s mission and goals so staff are well-equipped to encourage parent participation. Directors felt that providing continued education opportunities for staff and special recognition for the preschool would promote the value-added service that the HC offers. Providing recruitment materials and modest financial support would facilitate preschool participation. To promote participation, directors suggested showcasing the HC at after-school events and in regular communications with parents and also offering parents modest incentives that promote program goals (e.g., hula hoop to promote physical activity). Round 2 of interviews gathered feedback on the summary of round 1 interviews and provided further insight into disseminating the HC through preschools. Directors felt the most helpful and convenient way to train staff was via printed materials and webinars. Offering continued education units would boost completion of training. Directors recommended using print and electronic materials to recruit parents (e.g., posters, banners, flyers). Afterschool events highlighting HC activities that allow parents and kids to experience aspects of the program could be an effective recruitment method, but busy family schedules tend to limit participation at these events. To minimize the burden of promoting the HC, directors felt they needed ready access to the HC project team and financial support to compensate staff for time spent on project activities.

Conclusion: Although none had ever offered a program like the HC, nearly all were interested in participating in the HC and suggested numerous strategies to overcome potential barriers and facilitate its implementation.

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Results

Suggestions for Promoting the HomeStyles Challenge
- Inform staff about the HomeStyles Challenge (goals, logistics, alignment with preschool mission)
- Explain the value-added service that the HC offers preschools

Suggestions for Boosting School Participation
- Provide preschools with recruitment materials
- Offer preschools modest financial support

Suggestions for Promoting Parent Participation
- Show the HC at after-school events
- Advertise the HC in regular communications with parents (e.g., emails, newsletters)

Suggestions for Offering Staff Training
- Provide training via printed materials and webinars
- Award continuing education units

Suggestions for Minimizing the Burden on Preschools
- Give ready access to the HC project team
- Provide financial support to compensate staff for time spent on project activities

Strengths & Limitations

Strengths
- Interviews were with gatekeepers: Preschool Directors
- Scripted, dual round interviews
- Interviews conducted by trained researchers

Limitation
- Greater representation of fee-for-service preschools, limited participants from public preschools

Conclusions
- Nearly all preschool directors were interested in participating in the HomeStyles Challenge
- Numerous strategies were suggested to overcome potential barriers and facilitate implementation of the program