

DEMYSTIFYING COOKING: BREAKING THE BARRIERS FOR PARENTS OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN AND IMPLICATIONS FOR USE IN A SCHOOL-BASED NUTRITION INTERVENTION

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Abstract

Background: Obesity is of national concern because obesity in early childhood poses an increased risk to children of developing chronic conditions as they enter into adulthood. Therefore, it is important to examine the food-related behaviors that lead to daily food decisions – one of which is cooking-related skills. There has been a significant decrease in the amount of time spent cooking at home, leading to a loss of critical cooking skills and overall poor food selection. In combination, these are contributing risk factors to obesity rates. One method to address the alarming rates of childhood obesity is through the use of school-based interventions. These types of interventions work best when they involve a parental component. Therefore, finding ways to engage parents to make behavioral modifications at home (including cooking behaviors) has become a focus in developing school-based nutrition education programs.

Purpose: The emphasis of this research paper is to examine the motivators and barriers that parents face when making the choice to cook (or not) both on their own and with their children, as well as identify notions regarding parents' self-efficacy in the kitchen. Furthermore, this paper strives to identify the best ways to engage parents in a school-based nutrition and activity intervention, specifically with regards to cooking in order to overcome these barriers and enhance the motivators to cook at home. In combination, this research will inform the messaging and strategies used in the school-based intervention “Fuel for Fun: Cooking with Kids 2.0 plus Parents and Play” (FFF).

Methods: An extensive literature review was conducted examining barriers and motivators to parents cooking at home. Using information gathered from the literature, cooking booths were developed and piloted as an opportunity for informally guided conversations with parents to assess planned strategies to engage parents, and address parents' cooking knowledge, skills, attitudes and self-efficacy of food-related behaviors in the home environment. Semi structured interviews were also conducted with key personnel of adult nutrition education programs to determine which strategies these nutrition and health education professionals deemed most successful in engaging adult participants. Recommendations for the FFF program were then developed by synthesizing themes that emerged upon analysis of the multiple forms of data.

Results: The biggest barriers for adults to cooking at home as identified in the literature review and confirmed via the guided conversations with parents and semi structured interviews with key personnel were: time, money, picky eaters, and lack of skill (self-efficacy). Using triangulation of multiple sources of data, this research project led to recommendations for how to best achieve parental engagement in making cooking behavioral modifications – including; framing parental components of school-based interventions in the tenants of Adult Learning Theory (ALT), creating a supportive community for parents

to engage in dialogue with each other, having parents employ food-based role-modeling with their children, and focusing on topics that address cooking barriers and motivators.

Conclusions: The results of this research project highlight the importance of cooking as it relates to obesity. There are both barriers and motivators that contribute to the behaviors of parents cooking at home. Overcoming cooking barriers is the first step in motivating parents to change their cooking behaviors as one feasible method for the treatment of obesity.