



Healthy + Active  
Before 5

## Sample Policy to Reduce Marketing of Unhealthy Foods and Beverages to Children

*Please note:* This policy is provided as a sample only.

Please revise and amend to suit the needs and capabilities of your organization or agency.

### Rationale:

**Children have a right to a healthy childhood, free from marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages. Organizations can ensure all children have a healthy start in life by adopting organizational practices and policies that reduce marketing to children. This is important to childhood health because we know that:**

**Marketing influences what kids eat.** While the childhood obesity crisis has many complex and interconnected causes, strong evidence suggests that advertising of foods and beverages has a direct influence on what children eat. This is important to health because children establish their lifetime food preferences and eating habits during childhood.<sup>1</sup>

**Most food and beverage products advertised to children are unhealthy.** In the U.S. alone, the food and beverage industry spends nearly \$2 billion each year on advertising to children,<sup>2</sup> ensuring not only that ads are almost everywhere, but are also sophisticated, aggressive, and highly persuasive. What's more, almost every food and beverage product advertised to children is unhealthy. A study of advertisements during children's television programming found that over 80% of ads featured unhealthy foods.<sup>3</sup>

**Watching TV or playing internet games means more exposure to unhealthy advertising and less time for active play.** The more time children spend in front of television, computer, and other screens, the more likely they are to be overweight or obese.<sup>4</sup>

**Kids don't know an ad when they see one.** Most children under four years of age cannot distinguish between advertisement and entertainment. Food and beverage companies entice children to consume unhealthy foods and drinks by advertising with cartoon characters and celebrities and offering incentive items like free toys and games.<sup>5</sup>

**Low-income children of color are disproportionately exposed to unhealthy food and beverage marketing.** Food and beverage marketers use a host of strategies to appeal to children and families in these communities, the same communities that are highly impacted by diet-related chronic diseases. Culturally-resonant advertisements, pricing strategies, and marketing plans all commonly target children and communities of color.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on Food Marketing & the Diets of Children and Youth. Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity? Eds. J.M. McGinnis, J. Appleton Gootman, V. Kraak. Institute of Medicine. 2006.

<sup>2</sup> A Review of Marketing Food to Children and Adolescents: Follow-Up Report. Washington, DC: Federal Trade Commission, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Harrison K, Marske A. Nutritional content of foods advertised during the television programs children watch most. American Journal of Public Health, 2005; 95:1568-1574.

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<sup>4</sup> Danner FW. A national longitudinal study of the association between hours of TV viewing and the trajectory of BMI growth among US children. J Pediatr Psychol. 2008;33(10):1100-1107

<sup>5</sup> id. (IOM)

<sup>6</sup> Dorfman, L. and Wootan M. "Expert Commentary—Corporate Irresponsibility: Junk Food Marketing to Children." Available at : <http://fasinfat.org/food-marketing/>



## What do marketing practices have to do with organizational practices and policies?

Organizations can protect kids from unhealthy marketing by adopting and implementing policies and practices to reduce unhealthy marketing onsite. Below is a marketing audit that you can perform at your organization to help you identify areas to focus on:

### Marketing Audit:

1. Walk around your organization/agency and look at posters, pictures, and visible logos. Do any of these have characters associated with unhealthy foods or beverages?
2. Do you have vending machines at your organization/agency? Do they offer primarily healthy or unhealthy products? Do the logos on the machine promote food or beverage brand names associated with unhealthy products that you don't endorse for your clients?
3. During the last year, has your organization promoted or participated in offering coupons, contests, or giveaways for unhealthy products?
4. Do you have a screen time policy for children in your care? (Screen time includes TV, movies, computer time, mobile apps, and videogames.) Does your policy specify time limits for television, video games, computers, and mobile applications? Are your policies posted?
5. Do your public spaces have televisions or active toys and games? Count the number of televisions and the number of play spaces in your organization. Which number is greater?
6. Do you have an organizational policy regarding use of cell phones and devices with screens for families that you serve?
7. Do you have any books, posters, or other materials that promote healthy foods, physical activity, or limited screen time in places where families can see them? Are these kinds of books and games easily available?
8. Do you sell food to families and children? If so, where are the unhealthy products placed? Are they at a child's eye-level or at a featured location, such as the checkout aisle?
9. Do you offer spaces for children to be active, such as child-centered indoor or outdoor waiting rooms? Do you have a policy regarding active play for young children? (Sample HAB45 Movement & Play policy available on our website).
10. Do you have a partnership, promotions, sponsorship, and donations policy for your organization? Does it discourage partnerships with companies or donations of products that are unhealthy?



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**Sample Policy Statement:** *(Note: The policy suggestions below are examples of strategies to consider. Your organization does not necessarily have to adopt all of the below policy suggestions. Choose one or two from each category for starters. Begin with what is possible and build from there.)*

<Organization/agency name> is committed to promoting a healthy environment for young children, free from unhealthy food and beverage advertisements. <Organization/agency name> recognizes that while marketing practices shape health, so do organizational practices and policies. Therefore, <organization/agency name> will adopt the following policies and practices:

**Limit screen time at <organization/agency name> by:**

- Following the recommendation of The American Academy of Pediatrics that families and caretakers limit screen time for children ages 2 and older to less than 2 hours a day and no screen time for children under 2. (Screen time includes TV, movies, computer time, mobile apps, and videogames.)
- Limiting or prohibiting screen time in offices or waiting rooms where children are present.
- Keeping all electronic devices and television turned off at mealtimes.
- Only offering television programs, video games, movies, and internet sites with limited or no commercials or marketing.

**Counter unhealthy foods and beverage advertisements by:**

- Modeling healthy eating with a daily routine of enjoying mealtimes without distraction.
- Actively promoting healthy, unbranded foods and beverages with books and educational materials.
- Using the same tactics as marketers to persuade children that healthy foods and beverages are fun.

**Share information about the role of marketing in children's health by:**

- Informing staff and clients about your screen-time policies and the reasons behind your policies.
- Working with clients with children to limit their children's daily screen time.
- Work with clients to understand and identify the ways in which marketers target communities of color.

**Support a healthy environment at <organization/agency name> by:**

- Performing a marketing audit (see page 2) and identifying areas for improvement.
- Accepting donations, giveaways, promotional deals, and sponsorships that align with our healthy messaging, enhance our ability to act in the best interest of our clients, and further our mission.
- Reducing or prohibiting onsite presence of characters, celebrities, games, sports, and toys promoting unhealthy foods.
- Ensuring that the children we serve have time for active play, exposure to nature, healthy foods, and time with families, friends, and caring adults.

**Advocate for healthier food environments for children by:**

- Supporting public policies that reduce marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to all children.

***For technical assistance, contact us at [info@hab45.org](mailto:info@hab45.org)***

***Healthy & Active Before 5 (HAB45) is a collaborative project to prevent obesity among Contra Costa County children ages 0-5***