

Family Fun with New Foods – Encouraging Low-Income Parents to Offer New Foods to their Preschool-aged Children

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Food Friends—Making New Foods Fun for Kids™ is a program that is currently being implemented in preschool centers for low-income families throughout Colorado. This program combines social marketing and educational strategies to increase preschool children's willingness to try new foods. In order to provide children with repeated opportunities to learn about, choose, and try new foods outside of the preschool setting, a parent component to the *Food Friends* social marketing campaign was developed based on formative research, expert advice, current literature, and constructs of the Social Learning Theory. Numerous studies indicate the need for nutrition education resources aimed at encouraging parents to offer new foods to children, help children explore and learn about foods, and provide children with a variety of healthful foods to facilitate their development of healthful eating behaviors. Parents have indicated a preference for nutrition information to be sent home from school with their child in the form of newsletters, educational handouts, and activities to do with their child as a better means of information dissemination than face-to-face workshops or classes. Our own formative evaluation with low-income parents assessed desirable features of nutrition education materials and programs. The parent component of the *Food Friends-Making New Foods Fun for Kids* program, titled *Family Fun with New Foods*, helps parents create an environment that provides children with multiple opportunities to learn about and try new foods outside of the preschool setting. *Family Fun* educational resources address barriers to offering new foods, suggestions for ways to offer a variety of new foods, and ideas to help children learn about and try new foods. Also included are recommendations for communicating with children to encourage them to eat new foods, strategies to make meals less stressful, information about the effect of multiple food exposure and the use of reward systems on children's food preferences. *Family Fun with New Foods* materials are based on seven simple tips to assist parents in offering new foods to their children: Make food fun; Keep offering new foods; Be a good role model by eating new foods with your child; Let your child choose new foods; Help your child learn about new foods; Try offering one new food at a time; and Avoid forcing your child to eat new foods. These tips are seen repeatedly through bilingual parent materials, including: newsletter articles, handouts, activity tips with recipes, and fun food activities for families. Colorful handouts supply parents with quick and easy recipes that involve their children, tips for offering new foods, and activities that incorporate school readiness skills into learning about new foods. The parent component also includes educational enhancers, such as magnets and shopping lists, to remind parents to offer new foods to their families. *Food Friends* is funded in part by the USDA Food Stamp Program through the Colorado Department of Human Services, Caring for Colorado Foundation, The Colorado Trust, General Mills Foundation, Colorado's Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Team Nutrition through the Colorado Department of Education.