



Media-Smart Youth: Eat, Think, and Be Active!®

Introduction

Media-Smart Youth: Eat, Think, and Be Active!® is an after-school education program for youth ages 11 to 13. The curriculum combines media literacy and youth development principles and practices with research findings and federal recommendations about nutrition and physical activity. This curriculum was designed to assist youth in gaining the following skills: (a) becoming aware of and thinking critically about the media's role in influencing nutrition and physical activity choices, (b) making informed decisions about being physically active and eating nutritious food on a daily basis, (c) establishing healthy habits that will last into adulthood, and (d) learning about media and creating media products to educate peers.

Program Components

Key Areas

Youth participate in ten structured lessons that are facilitated by an adult in their after-school or community program. The lessons are based on four key areas and end with a Big Production.

- **Media awareness:** Youth learn how to recognize and analyze techniques that media producers use to get their attention and how to evaluate media messages for accuracy and consistency with their ideas about being healthy.
- **Media production:** Youth practice what they learn in each lesson by creating Mini-Productions in which they develop their own media messages. The Big Produc-



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tion, the program's concluding project, enables youth to create media products that promote healthy nutrition and physical activity to their peers.

- **Nutrition:** A variety of activities encourage youth to choose vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and calcium-rich foods, and to reduce their consumption of solid fats and added sugars. Lessons also encourage youth to be thoughtful when choosing snacks; each lesson includes a Snack Break in which youth enjoy nutritious foods they may not have tried before.
- **Physical activity:** Youth learn the importance of daily physical activity and develop strategies to become more active in their daily lives. Physical activity, they discover, is anything that gets their bodies moving, such as walking

the dog, dancing, or carrying groceries. A 10-minute Action Break during each lesson engages youth in a fun physical activity.

Ten structured lessons

Each of the ten lessons follow the same structure and are designed to engage and motivate youth. Table 1 shows the ten different lesson topics and a sample lesson plan is shown in Table 2.

Big Production

The curriculum concludes with the Big Production, which is a media project that youth create to motivate their peers to take action for better nutrition and increased physical activity. The Big Production allows youth to put all that they've learned about media, nutrition, and physical activity into practice. Big Productions range from simple projects, such as a store window display



or school newspaper article, to more complex ones, such as a blog, video, or a physical activity event to raise money for a local charity.

Program Materials

Media-Smart Youth provides all the materials needed to plan and implement the program. All materials are accessible free of charge on the following website: www.nichd.nih.gov/msy/Pages/index.aspx. The materials can either be downloaded or ordered and shipped for no charge.

Curriculum Packet

The curriculum packet includes the following:

- **Facilitator's Guide:** The guide contains step-by-step instructions on how to lead the ten structured lessons. It also discusses some of the key issues and decisions to consider before implementing the *Media-Smart Youth* curriculum. A variety of helpful resources are also included.
- **Media-Smart Youth DVD:** The DVD includes 13 video segments that supplement the lessons and provide an overview of the program for adult facilitators and youth participants.
- **6 Media Questions Poster:** This poster highlights key questions youth can ask as they analyze media and draw their own conclusions about the messages they see and hear.

Train-the-Trainer Packet

Administrators, program managers at youth-serving organizations, or individuals who work with youth in another capacity, can train staff or volunteers to implement the curriculum with young people. The train-the-trainer packet provides everything needed to conduct a half-day workshop to train staff and volunteers to conduct *Media-Smart Youth*.

Table 1

10 Lesson Topics Covered in *Media-Smart Youth*



- Lesson 1: Welcome to Media-Smart Youth
- Lesson 2: Thinking About Media
- Lesson 3: Asking Questions
- Lesson 4: Nutrition Know-How... Eat It Up
- Lesson 5: Motion Commotion... What Is Being Active?
- Lesson 6: Visiting A Grocery Store
- Lesson 7: The Power of Advertising
- Lesson 8: Super Snacks and Better Bones
- Lesson 9: Making Smart Choices Fun and Easy
- Lesson 10: Getting Into the Production Mode

Table 2.
Sample Lesson Plan (From Lesson 4)

LESSON STRUCTURE	SAMPLE
Activity A: These activities emphasize one of the four key areas of Media-Smart Youth: media awareness, media production, nutrition, or physical activity.	Hurray for Whole Grains! The activity begins with a brief discussion about grains and whole grains and their importance to health. The youth act out a grain milling process to demonstrate the difference between a whole grain and an enriched, refined grain. The activity ends with a quick discussion about ways to choose more whole-grain foods in daily eating.
Snack Break: The delicious and nutritious snacks reinforce the concepts described in the lessons.	Fruit and Krunch Kebabs: Youth make their own kebabs by dipping fruits in fat-free or low-fat yogurt and rolling the fruit in whole-grain breakfast cereal.
Activity B: These activities build on what youth learned during Activity A and further emphasize the objectives of the lesson.	Cutting Back on Solid Fats and Added Sugars: Youth talk about the importance of choosing foods that are low in solid fats and added sugars. They also discuss some major sources of solid fats and added sugars and work in groups to identify ways to reduce consumption of these items when choosing foods and drinks.
Action Break: Youth have the chance to get up, get active, and get energized.	A Cool Wind Blows: Similar to musical chairs, this activity has youth answer questions related to media, food, and physical activity while switching chairs. The person left without a chair at the end of a round asks a question in the next round, until everyone has a turn.
Activity C—Mini-Production: Youth use the skills they have learned in the lesson to create a simple media product, such as a blog, jingle, skit, billboard, or page for a social networking site.	Creating a Nutrition Fan Page for a Social Networking Site: Youth design a mock page for other young people, which incorporates the food and nutrition topics covered so far in the workshop—increasing consumption of vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain foods and reducing consumption of solid fats and added sugars.
Finishing Up the Lesson: Youth summarize the day's lesson, ask questions, and receive take-home materials with targeted tips for practicing their media smarts.	Finishing Up the Lesson: Youth share something interesting or fun they learned during the lesson and get a chance to ask questions. They also receive the Take Home a New Idea! and Tips for Media-Smart Parents handouts before they leave.



- **Guide for Training Program Facilitators:** The guide contains ten modules with interactive exercises to provide facilitators with an overview of the curriculum, program objectives, and content areas, and to allow facilitators to experience some of the activities that the young participants will do. A complete set of handouts for facilitator trainees is also included.
- **Presentation CD-ROM:** This disk includes slide presentations that supplement the training and give an overview and introduction to *Media-Smart Youth*.

Tips for Media-Smart Parents

Parents and families play an important role in creating and reinforcing healthy eating and physical activity behaviors. Handouts for parents and/or guardians are sent home with youth participants after each lesson. The handouts summarize what the young adult has learned during the day's lesson and suggest ways to put what they learned into action at home. For example, in Lesson 1, youth explore ways to add fruits and vegetables to their daily eating. The *Tips for Media-Smart Parents* handout for this lesson provides specific ideas for including



more fruits and vegetables in meals and snacks at home, such as adding fruit to cereal or fat-free or low-fat yogurt at breakfast; having a veggie-rich salad at lunch or dinner; and snacking on vegetables and fruits, such as cherry tomatoes or grapes.

Evidence for Media-Smart Youth Program

In January 2009, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) completed a comprehensive evaluation of *Media-Smart Youth* to assess how the curriculum could be implemented in an after-school program environment and to measure the program outcomes among the youth who participated. The NICHD conducted the evaluation of *Media-Smart Youth* using a randomized group experimental design. Pairs of schools with after-school programs were matched according to socioeconomic status of the schools' communities and were randomly assigned to either the experimental or the control group. Results indicated that, compared to youth who did not participate in the program, youth who participated in *Media-Smart Youth* showed: (a) a statistically significant increase in knowledge and skills in nutrition, physical activity, media awareness, and media analysis, (b) a trend toward positive intention to change behavior in the next month by making more healthy choices, such as doing more weight-bearing activities, eating fewer high-fat snacks, and eating or drinking more foods with calcium.

The Office of Children with Special Health Care Needs within the Bureau of Women's and Children's Health (BWCH) at the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) recently completed a comprehensive review of published, peer-reviewed research on health promotion curricula that combined nutrition and physical activity components. Forty-two articles were appraised based on study quality, intervention effects, and the relevance of the curriculum for children with special

health care needs and their families. Programs were considered relevant if they were inclusive and appropriate for a variety of children with special health care needs, had the potential to prevent secondary conditions, involved family members, and were suitable for implementation in a variety of home and community settings. *Media-Smart Youth* received one of the top scores indicating it has strong research support and can be implemented in a flexible manner so that it is relevant to children with special health care needs and their families.

Appropriate Modifications

Media-Smart Youth was designed for and evaluated in after-school programs for youth ages 11-13; however, with some minor modifications it can be used with younger and older children and in different settings.

- **Other Children:** Children from different ethnic groups, including Hispanics, African Americans, and Asians have participated in *Media-Smart Youth*. Results from some of these groups of individuals have not been reported, but the format of lessons within *Media-Smart Youth* may be appropriate for culturally diverse youth. During the evaluation of *Media-Smart Youth* data were only recorded for children ages 11-13; however, children of other ages participated in the program, but their data were not recorded. This suggests that the curriculum is appropriate for children of other ages. The content in *Media-Smart Youth* can be implemented, with few modifications, with children under the age of 11 and over the age of 13 (approximately age 9 through age 15, or children in upper elementary school through junior high school).



- **Other Settings:** Although *Media-Smart Youth* was evaluated in an after school environment, the setting, or place in which the curriculum is carried out, can easily be modified. The content within *Media-Smart Youth* can be implemented in a variety of settings, including hospitals, clinical settings, or homes.

There are some components of the program that cannot be modified, as these are the components that make the program effective. These include: a) length of the sessions, b) basic prescribed format for delivering each lesson, and c) the training component.

- **Length of Sessions:** The sessions are designed to be at least 90 minutes in length. During evaluation, data gathered from facilitators indicated that the most difficult part of sticking to the prescribed lesson was fitting everything in during the 90 minutes. Portions of the lessons were left out, because facilitators didn't have enough time to complete all parts of the lesson. Lessons should be at least 90 minutes in order to fit in all the activities rather than skipping activities. If time is an obstacle, it is better to break lessons into different days, but still cover all of the necessary content (e.g., half of Lesson 4 could be taught on one day and the other half of Lesson 4 could be taught during the following session).
- **Lesson Format/Lesson Plan:** Each lesson is designed to teach a specific skill, which is evaluated at the end of the program. If activities or portions of lessons are skipped or not taught as described in the facilitator's guide, children may miss learning specific skills, and not perform well on the evaluation at the end of the program. Facilitators should strictly follow the step-by-step

instructions for teaching each lesson in the facilitator's guide.

- **Training:** A trained facilitator is an essential component of a successful program. *Media-Smart Youth* includes a train-the-trainer packet. This training includes 10 modules with interactive exercises that prepare the facilitator to implement each lesson. If a facilitator is not adequately trained, it can drastically affect the results for individuals participating in the program. Facilitators must fully participate in the training provided in the train-the-trainer packet.

Considerations for CYSHCN

Although many CYSHCN will be able to participate in the *Media-Smart Youth* program without modifications, many types of adaptations are acceptable based on the abilities of the child or youth. *Media-Smart Youth* is designed to include up to 15 youth participants per group, but a simple modification could be to deliver the program with a small group or individually. There is flexibility in terms of the configuration (e.g., numbers of sessions per week or month) of sessions. *Media-Smart Youth* can be delivered twice a week, once a month, or in a camp style format (i.e., daily sessions over a 2 week period), depending on what is suitable for the child or youth with special health care needs. Many modifications can be made that do not distract from the main idea of the lesson. For example, one of the aims of the program is to increase awareness of advertising techniques. Videos are commonly used in demonstrations and examples, but they are not the only type of media that can be used. Other types of media may be more interesting, relevant, or appropriate for a specific individual. It is critical to understand the main purpose of the lesson and to avoid strict adherence



to the suggested activities. Life-long nutrition and physical activity should be emphasized over the completion of specific activities that could potentially exclude a child or youth from full participation.

A holistic approach to health promotion that respects individual worth and community has many benefits for CYSHCN. Although *Media-Smart Youth* is not specifically based on values of family and community involvement, it is recommended that professionals strive to ensure individuals and their families are integral to the implementation and modification process. The families and the children and youth themselves have direct knowledge of relevant abilities and interests. When considering modifications for CYSHCN, professionals should openly discuss and honor individuals' and families' choices of media and physical activities, thereby ensuring proper inclusion of CYSHCN in the *Media-Smart Youth* program.



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