

# Weigh of Life...Taking Action Together

## *Targeted Messages for Hispanic Families*

### **1. Message - A slender looking child is a healthy child.**

Background: To Hispanic mothers, the appearance of an overweight child means the child is healthy. They worry that if a child is too thin, he will get sick and have health problems. Thin equates with being sickly. Parents are subject to disapproving comments from family or friends if the child is thin. This message depicts a child at a healthy weight.

### **2. Message - Developing good eating habits makes a lifelong difference.**

Background: Mothers are not aware that eating patterns established early in life are directly related to lifelong health. They also are not aware that overweight in early childhood sets the stage for weight issues in adolescence and adulthood. Part of teaching good eating habits means allowing the child to eat according to his innate sense of hunger and fullness, rather than controlling the amount of food that is consumed. This message promotes establishing healthy eating patterns that can last a lifetime.

### **3. Message - Eat together as a family.**

Background: Hispanic families eat together in the old country because that is the custom. Businesses close, schools send children home to eat lunch and moms prepare meals that are shared by everyone. Hispanic mothers living in the U.S. often work and have schedules that don't allow for family meals. In addition, they often feed their child separately or allow them to eat in front of the TV. Hispanic mothers know the importance of eating together. This message encourages mothers to go back to their cultural traditions by having regular family meals.

### **4. Message - Offer your child a variety of food instead of a steady diet of milk and juice.**

Background: To Hispanic families, milk is a core, essential food for children. It is not unusual for children to remain on the bottle until five years of age. This leads to the consumption of large quantities of milk and juice - often up to 10 cups a day - causing the child to eat very little other foods. Hispanic mothers view milk as a protective food and a complete meal. This message encourages drinking the right amount of milk and offering a variety of other foods for a balanced diet.

### **5. Message - Mom knows what is best for her child.**

Background: Raising children is a family affair in the Hispanic culture. Often grandparents or other relatives are the caregivers while the mother is at work. Mothers feel they lack control over their child's diet. Mothers may want to wean the child from the bottle, cut milk or limit sweets, but feel powerless when others are caring for their child. Mothers complain that all their hard work to establish good eating habits can be "undone within hours at Grandma's house". This message encourages mothers to take control of their child's eating patterns regardless of who is feeding him and to encourage family members to show their child love in ways other than with food.

### **6. Message - Mothers will be surprised that children enjoy eating healthy foods—and this will make mothers happy.**

Background: Mothers feel they are good mothers when they can offer food to their children that the children like and will eat. Mothers need to continue to offer a wide-range of foods because children's likes and dislikes can change constantly. This message encourages mothers to make healthy food a part of everyday life - offering healthy food will make both mother and child happy.