



# Food Insecurity Screening Questionnaire and Suggestions

## for Creating a Park and Recreation Food Insecurity Screening and Assistance Practice

Many children experience hunger due to not being in school where they may receive free or reduced-price breakfasts and lunches. How do you know if children in your programs and their families are hungry? And what can you do about it? The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has created some tools for you to help children and families with food insecurity— check these out and share them broadly so children can receive the food and good nutrition they need for their growing bodies.

Because park and recreation agencies see many children and adults on a regular basis, you are in a unique position to help identify and assist children and families who are experiencing food insecurity or are at risk of being food insecure. If you find out some of the children and/or families you serve are food insecure, you may be able to help them get some food support from federal food programs<sup>1</sup> and/or community organizations.<sup>2</sup>

### Child Hunger

How do you determine if a child at your park and recreation site is food insecure? You can start by observing children in your programs — do any of them display some common signs of hunger in the list below?

1. They ask for food every day, and they are not picky.
2. They suddenly lose or gain weight (low-price, low-quality food typically is high in calories/sugar and results in weight gain).
3. They hoard snacks and food.
4. They are bullying or behaving badly.
5. Their teeth are decaying (due to consuming too much processed foods with sugar).<sup>3</sup>



### Adult Food Insecurity Screening Questions

If it appears that a child is hungry, the next step may be to reach out to their parents or the adult who cares for them. Adult screening for food insecurity can be done quickly, and in a non-threatening way. Experts in food insecurity have found that asking adults just two questions is a reliable and valid way to find out if they are food insecure.<sup>4</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Food Research & Action Center suggested the following scenario for asking the two questions:<sup>5</sup>

I'm going to read you two statements that people have made about their food situation. For each statement, please tell me whether the statement was **often** true, **sometimes** true, or **never** true for your household in the last 12 months.

1. "We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more." Was that **often** true, **sometimes** true, or **never** true for your household in the last 12 months?
2. "The food that we brought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more." Was that **often**, **sometimes**, or **never** true for your household in the last 12 months?

**A response of "often" or "sometimes" to either question means the family is food insecure.**



## Food Insecurity Screening and Assistance as a Park and Recreation Practice

Depending on the priorities and resources at your park and recreation site, you may decide to implement a **food insecurity screening and assistance practice** at your park and recreation site. Below are some strategies for implementing such a practice at your park and recreation site:

- Include food insecurity screening questions as part of your program registration processes, including the questions in written form with other paperwork. Also consider handing out food assistance information during registration events.
- Ensure all staff know some of the signs of child hunger, your site's procedure for handling potential child hunger, and some of the food resources in your community.
- Designate one staff member to be the food insecurity point-of-contact, a "Hunger Champion," who can receive reports of potential child hunger from other staff, administer the food insecurity screening questions, assist families with securing resources for food (SNAP, WIC, community food resources), and generally keep the food insecurity screening and referral process updated and implemented at all times (see checklists included elsewhere in this set of resources).
- Show sensitivity when talking with parents and caregivers about food insecurity. Parents and caregivers may feel a sense of shame, embarrassment, or even fear when talking about food insecurity, so it is important to show compassion and care when screening for and addressing food insecurity. Parents and caregivers also may not want to talk about food insecurity in front of their children, so consider ways to create an "adult-only" space for food insecurity conversations.
- Post information about federal food programs and local community food assistance at your park and recreation site and make information available as a handout as well. This can help destigmatize the use of federal nutrition programs and reinforce how they help children and adults stay healthy by eating well. Don't forget to include your Hunger Champion's contact information on some of the materials, perhaps post a sheet of paper whereby parents can tear off your Hunger Champion's contact information.
- Consider inviting community partners who assist with food insecurity (food banks, farmers markets/CSAs that accept SNAP, etc.) to your events — registration events, health fairs, picnics, parent meetings, once-a-month at child pick up, or other times when parents and caregivers of children in need are at your park and recreation site.
- Consider evaluating the impact of your food insecurity screening and assistance practice to determine how effective you have been, and where improvements in the process can be made. Set a schedule for conducting your evaluation (phases of your evaluation) so you don't forget to do it!



## Nutrition Supports for Food Insecurity Families

There are a number of federal and community-based nutrition supports for families you serve. Included in this toolkit are the SNAP and WIC Eligibility Checklist and the SNAP and WIC Enrollment Assistance Checklist — use these to help you connect families in need with federal food program such as those found below.

Name of Program	Age of Participant	Food Resources Provided
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly “Food Stamps”)	For all ages	Monthly benefit to buy food at grocery stores, corner markets, some farmers markets, and other food retailers
National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program Free and Reduced-price Meals Program	Children K to 12	Children can receive free or reduced-prices meals at schools that participate in this program
National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Afterschool Snacks	Children K to 12	Children can receive one snack per day if enrolled in regularly scheduled activities in a structured and supervised environment, including an educational or enrichment activity, where the NSLP is offered
National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Afterschool Snacks Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	Children up to age five Adults	Up to two free meals and a snack for infants and young children at child care centers, Head Start, and Early Head Start, as well as adults who are enrolled for care at participating day care homes, and adult day care centers
Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)	Children 18 and under	Up to two free meals per day at approved school and community sites during summer break
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women; infants; children up to age five	Resources to buy nutritionally-specified foods at grocery and food stores that accept WIC
The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)	All ages	Emergency food items distributed through pantries, schools, faith-based organizations, and others

At the state and local level, identify the central coordinator for anti-hunger support in your state. These organizations help connect food insecure families not only to federal nutrition programs, but also to state programs (usually responsible for school meals, child care meals, and out-of-school time meals) and community-based assistance (such as food banks, community pantries, etc.). Find some of these anti-hunger organizations at: [bit.ly/statehungerassist](https://bit.ly/statehungerassist). Make sure your state's organizations are included on your food assistance referral list, and this list is provided to staff and families in need.

Some helpful resources for creating your park and recreation food insecurity Screening and Assistance Practice are found below:

- SNAP: [fns.usda.gov/snap/state-directory](https://fns.usda.gov/snap/state-directory)
- WIC: [bit.ly/WICinfoNRPA](https://bit.ly/WICinfoNRPA)
- Feeding America: [feedingamerica.org](https://feedingamerica.org) and [hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org](https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org)
- Local food banks: [feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank](https://feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank)
- State Anti-hunger Organizations: [bit.ly/statehungerassist](https://bit.ly/statehungerassist)



<sup>1</sup>USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP, used to be called Food Stamps], Women Infants and Children [WIC], Free and Reduced Priced Meals of the USDA National School Lunch Program.

<sup>2</sup>Such as food banks, church food pantries, soup kitchens, etc.

<sup>3</sup>Find more details of these five signs of hunger at <https://www.ymca.org/blog/five-signs-child-struggling-summer-hunger>.

<sup>4</sup>Questions are based on the *U.S. Household Food Security Survey*.

<sup>5</sup>Addressing Food Insecurity: A Toolkit for Pediatricians. 2017, Feb. American Academy of Pediatrics and the Food Research & Action Center. <https://frac.org/aaptoolkit> (accessed on May 1, 2020).