



Talking to Parents

When treating a child with overweight or obesity, it is important to provide parents with appropriate information and to approach discussions of weight sensitively. Below are some strategies to consider.

- 1. Educate.** Some parents do not have an accurate perception of their child's weight and may be unsure about what is considered a healthy weight in growing children.
 - Clearly explain the concept of "body mass index" (BMI) percentiles and its uses.
 - Discuss associated health risks at different BMI percentiles.
 - Discuss other factors that contribute to a child's health besides BMI.
- 2. Avoid blame.** This is unhelpful as parents will likely feel less equipped to help their children and more likely to be dissatisfied with pediatric care.
 - Avoid language that criticizes and places blame on parents or the child.
 - Help parents identify ways that they can help to improve their child's health.
- 3. Use supportive communication.** Certain words about body weight can be offensive to both children and parents, so being mindful of your language is an important part of a productive discussion about weight-related health.
 - Use neutral language such as "weight" or "BMI," instead of "fat" or "obese."
 - Consider asking parents and children before initiating the conversation:
 - *Could we talk about your weight today?*
 - *How do you feel about your weight?*
 - *What words would you like me to use when we talk about your weight?*
 - Use motivational interviewing strategies to help empower parents to take steps toward making healthy behavior changes for their child.
- 4. Provide resources.** Even if parents recognize that their child is at an unhealthy weight, they may lack information about how to best help their child or not know where to start.
 - Suggest *specific* health behaviors that parents and children can engage in such as limiting the unhealthy foods at home, eating more fruits and vegetables, or replacing sugar-sweetened beverages with water.
 - Discuss how to monitor and track improvements in the child's health behaviors.
 - Recommend specific resources for parents to consult, and the importance of talking to other health professionals, such as dietitians, or family-focused treatment programs.
- 5. Make it a family affair.** Rather than recommending a health plan for just the child, encourage parents and other family members to show their support by incorporating similar health changes.



Children are more likely to be successful if healthy changes are implemented and modeled by the whole family.

- Provide examples of behavioral goals that a family can achieve together including increasing family meals, replacing sugary drinks with water, or minimizing screen time.

6. Focus on healthy behaviors, not weight.

- Emphasize that the focus is on improved health, regardless of the child's weight.
- Explain the need to set realistic *behavior* change goals and monitor progress.
- Discuss the power of providing positive reinforcement as children begin to make changes

**Please Visit the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity webpage
to continue learning about weight bias in clinical settings and
how you can reduce the stigma:**

<http://www.yaleruddcenter.org>

Available resources include:

- ***[Video and Discussion Guide](#)***: This [17-minute video](#) hosted by celebrity and activist Emme and featuring Rudd Center experts including Dr. Rebecca Puhl and Dr. Kelly Brownell, helps raise awareness and offers a range of practical strategies. This is an ideal tool for educational use in medical staff trainings, medical school curricula, and health care continuing education.
- ***[Continuing Medical Education course called "Weight Bias in Clinical Settings: Improving Health Care Delivery for Patients with Obesity,"](#)*** which is the first evidence-based online learning tool designed to address the topic of weight bias in clinical settings. The course is designed to help health care providers become aware of personal attitudes that may affect health care delivery, and highlights appropriate and sensitive communication strategies to address weight with patients. This free course is accredited by the Yale University School of Medicine's Center for Continuing Medical Education (for 1 CME credit).
- ***[Online Toolkit](#)*** includes downloadable files that provide you with easy-to-implement solutions and resources for improving the delivery of care for patients with overweight or obesity. These strategies are adaptable to various practice settings and range from simple changes (e.g., improving communication and office environment) to more profound measures (e.g., self-examination of personal biases).
- ***[Motivational Interviewing](#)*** strategies for diet, exercise, and weight, exercises to complete with patients, and example scripts.
- ***[Assessment and Management of Adult Obesity](#)*** is a primer for physicians that includes strategies to deliver unbiased and sensitive care for patients with overweight or obesity.

