



Weight Bias & Weight-based Bullying



What is it? Weight-based bullying can occur in many places - at school, home, or even online.

Because of your weight, have you ever:

- Been made fun of or called names?
- Received harassing phone calls, emails or texts?
- Been ignored or excluded by peers?
- Been physically assaulted?
- Had rumors spread about you?
- Had your things stolen or damaged?

*Remember that weight-related bullying is **never** acceptable. It's just as wrong as being teased about race, gender, or religion.*

What happens to bullied kids and teens?

Bullying and teasing about weight can affect a teen's health and general well-being in many different ways.

- *Physical* – development of unhealthy eating habits, eating disorders, and avoidance of physical activity.
- *Emotional* – depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and poor body image.
- *Social* – withdrawal from usual activities and friends and fewer close friends.
- *Academic* – lower grades and skipping school to avoid bullying.

Why does it happen?

It could be a bully's way to be popular, look confident or be "in the spotlight." Maybe he or she was once bullied as well, and becoming a bully is a way to feel more powerful and hide insecurities.

People sometimes use fat humor and shaming if they think that overweight or obesity simply happens because of bad personal choices. *This is not true.* In fact, body weight is complex and determined by many factors including genetics, biology, and our environment. *Being affected by overweight is not a reason to blame or ridicule a person.*



What can you do? No one deserves to be bullied!

If you are being bullied:

- **Stay calm!** Standing up for yourself doesn't always mean fighting back. Walking away and ignoring them can make it more likely that bullies will leave you alone because they might get bored.
- **Project confidence!** Looking self-confident can make bullies less likely to pick on you.
- **Stay close to friends.** It is easier for bullies to target you if you are alone.
- **Find an adult.** Tell someone you trust such as a teacher, parent, or even a friend's parent. They might be able to give you advice and offer some possible solutions.
- **If the bully is a friend or family member, tell them how you feel.** Let them know that the teasing is hurtful and doesn't motivate you in a positive way.

If you see someone being bullied:

- **Help them.** Be an ally, not a passive bystander. Offer to help or provide support.
- **Find an adult.** Don't be afraid to speak up!

What next?

Sometimes people think that bullying will stop if they lose weight. But engaging in unhealthy or extreme strategies to lose weight can lead to unhealthy eating habits like bingeing, starving, or fad dieting, some of which can result in gaining more weight.

Look for healthier, longer-term strategies to address bullying.

Instead try some of these strategies:

- ✓ **Eat well and be active.** Replace sugary drinks with water. Pick fruits and vegetables instead of chips or candy. Pick a physical activity you enjoy like biking or walking.
- ✓ **Accept size diversity.** Look around – no two bodies are alike. Be tolerant of individual differences. Know that health comes in many sizes.
- ✓ **Value health over appearance.** Strive to develop healthy habits and a healthy body image. Achieving good health can be a fun process!
- ✓ **Be comfortable in your body.** Celebrate all the positive things that your body can do.
- ✓ **Be media smart.** Don't get caught up with air-brushed images and videos of celebrities, telling you what you *should* buy and what we *should* look like. Instead, think of realistic role models whose successes and experiences inspire you.

Get more information. Check out [Web Resources for Youth](#) handout to learn more about the issue and how you can help yourself and others.

