

Rudd Roots Parents **MYTHS & FACTS of Weight Bias**

Unfortunately, weight bias is still an accepted part of our society, which makes it a difficult issue to challenge. People who are unaware of their own weight biases often believe that individuals with overweight or obesity are simply lazy, lacking in willpower, have poor discipline, are unintelligent, and aren't trying to lose weight. Negative stereotypes can also be about children and their parents who are struggling with weight. These negative stereotypes can easily turn into stigma and prejudice, which have serious physical, emotional, social, and academic consequences for youth. Parents can help reduce this bias by dispelling the myths about body weight and obesity.

MYTH #1: *"Fat jokes are funny (and harmless)"*

 **FACT:** Fat jokes are no different from racist jokes.

- ✓ Disrespectful comments about weight, even "in good fun," is an expression of weight bias that promotes negative stereotypes. These jokes have serious consequences and affect people's physical and psychological health and social relationships.

MYTH #2: *"Stigma towards people with obesity will motivate them to lose weight"*

 **FACT:** Stigma can actually reinforce obesity-promoting behaviors and interfere with weight loss efforts.

- ✓ Experiencing weight stigma has negative consequences for the physical, psychological, and social well-being of individuals with overweight and obesity.
- ✓ People experiencing stigma because of their weight sometimes cope through unhealthy behaviors like binge eating, consuming more calories, and avoiding exercise.

MYTH #3: *"People with obesity could lose weight if they tried"*

 **FACT:** Even after trying their best, significant long-term weight loss may not be possible for many people with overweight or obesity.

- ✓ For many people, it is much harder to lose weight than it is to gain weight. Research shows that most people cannot maintain more than a 10% weight loss over time. Individuals who have lost a significant amount of weight often regain the weight within one to five years.



MYTH #4: *“Parents are responsible for their children with obesity”*

✓ **FACT:** Parents alone don’t determine a child’s body weight.

- ✓ Parents can certainly help children develop healthy lifestyles, but they are only one of many factors contributing to childhood obesity. For instance, consider advertisements about soda and candy targeted at youth, easy access to fast foods, unhealthy school meals, and neighborhoods without safe playing space.
- ✓ Blaming or shaming parents does not help. Instead, empower and support parents to make healthier changes for their families.

MYTH #5: *“Being overweight is always unhealthy”*

✓ **FACT:** Weight is not an automatic indicator of health.

- ✓ Along with weight, “good health” involves other health measurements such as blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and blood sugar levels.
- ✓ Someone with overweight can still be healthy with good eating and exercising habits. Alternatively, someone with ‘normal’ weight can be unhealthy and have other health indicators that put them at risk for disease. Body weight is only one factor that determines overall health.

MYTH #6: *“If people are affected by overweight, it is their own fault.”*

✓ **FACT:** Obesity is complex with many contributing factors

- ✓ Diet and exercise contribute to body weight, but obesity is also strongly influenced by genetics, biology, environment, food prices, marketing practices, and other factors.
- ✓ Many aspects of our society promote obesity and make it difficult to engage in healthy behaviors. For example, think about the greater availability and lower cost of unhealthy foods, widespread marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages (especially to youth), larger portion sizes, and more inactive work and school environments.