

Talking About Weight

Talking about weight is never easy, especially with children and teens. Since both kids and parents can feel uncomfortable, this topic can easily get ignored. However, educating youth about behaviors that promote not only a healthy weight, but also foster emotional well-being is important. To help you approach the issue in a sensitive and productive way, here are some tips:

Your **FOCUS** on...

Healthy behavior changes, rather than only weight loss

Weight loss is difficult and is not the only measure of improved health. Instead, focus on making specific healthy lifestyle changes for your child and the whole family. Engaging in healthy eating and physical activity is important for everyone, regardless of their body weight. Try to create a home environment where it is easy for children to make healthy choices, and praise them when they do.

➤ **What are some ideas for your child and your family?**

For more ideas, visit the [Web Resources for Parents](#) ("Healthy Family Living" section).

<i>For my child:</i>	<i>As a family:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Eat more fruits and vegetables-Drink water instead of soda or juice-Go for bike ride after school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Limit junk foods and sugary drinks-Walk together after dinner-Cook more family meals together

Your **Language**...

Avoid "should" statements. Instead of "you shouldn't eat that" or "you should eat healthier," try offering alternative behaviors or modeling a healthier behavior.

<i>Instead of saying:</i>	<i>Try saying this:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">-You shouldn't eat any more - you'll get fat if you eat that much.-You shouldn't be eating that since you need to lose weight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Let's wait another 20 minutes and then decide if you're still hungry.-Let's see if there are some healthier options available for us.





Be aware of your words and comments. Be clear that it's *always* wrong to negatively stereotype people with overweight. Watch the terminology you use to describe weight and comments you make about persons with overweight. Also, be conscious about what you say about your own body weight. Negative comments like "these pants make me look fat" can send harmful messages to children about body image and self-esteem.

<i>Words that can be Insulting</i>	<i>More neutral words to Use:</i>
-Fat -Weight problem -Chubby	- unhealthy weight -body weight - body mass index (BMI)

Your Role can be to...

Observe. Besides hunger, there are lots of reasons why people eat – sadness, anger, stress or even boredom. Help your kids identify potential triggers for overeating or turning to unhealthy foods. Have you noticed any patterns in when, why, or even where your kids pick up unhealthy foods? Share your observations and ask how you can help. Children sometimes turn to food to cope with underlying anxiety or stress. Identifying where the stress is coming from, and brainstorming healthier coping strategies to deal with stress, can be very helpful.

Involve the family. Children are more likely to feel motivated and to improve their health behaviors if other family members are too. Involve the whole family in efforts to improve eating and physical activity.

Encourage self-esteem. Remind your kids that their success and value has nothing to do with looks or body size. Complimenting them on accomplishments and qualities unrelated to appearance (e.g., kindness, working hard, being helpful) can help your kids to be proud and self-confident.

Support. Whether your kids need a good listener or a motivating coach, be available for them during both times of frustration and celebration.

