

Weight Bias for Teachers

What is it? Weight bias happens when negative attitudes about overweight result in stereotypes, prejudice, and unfair treatment of students. For example,

- Verbal comments (e.g., name-calling, derogatory remarks, or teasing)
- Social exclusion (e.g., ignoring or not including students in activities)
- Physical aggression (e.g., shoving)
- Humiliation (e.g., spreading rumors or cyber-bullying)
- Lower expectations of physical, social, and academic abilities

Weight bias can be expressed in both direct and indirect, subtle ways. Regardless, it is *never* acceptable to allow teasing in your classroom.

Why does it happen?

Societal and cultural factors strongly influence the acceptability of weight bias, especially the media and diet industry. The desirability of thinness and negative stereotyping of persons with overweight (e.g. beliefs that they are lazy or gluttonous) are frequently visible in television, books, films, ads, and music.

Surprisingly, teachers sometimes project this bias too. They may blame students or parents for a lack of willpower and discipline, and make negative assumptions about students' personality, hygiene, and family life, or abilities at school.

Get more information. Check out [Web Resources for Educators](#) handout to learn more about the issue and how you can stop weight bias in your classroom.

What happens to bullied students?

- *Physical:* weight gain, unsuccessful weight loss
- *Emotional:* lower self-esteem, poor body image, depression, and even suicidal thoughts and behaviors
- *Social:* less friends, less liked by peers, fewer close relationships
- *Academic:* lower grades, skipping school

What can you do?

- ✓ *Intervene* when you see examples of weight bias. Although you may be hesitant, ignoring the issue can have serious consequences.
- ✓ *Prevent.* Whether you dedicate class time to discussing weight bias or develop classroom policies about appropriate language and behavior, promote respect and tolerance for students of all body sizes.
- ✓ *Empower.* Consider role-playing to give students perspective of everyone involved in weight bias. This can encourage students to speak up and value the power of others.
- ✓ *Monitor* students who are being bullied because of their weight and notify parents if needed. Especially be aware during lunchtime and gym class.
- ✓ *Educate* students about why weight bias occurs, in particular the media's influence and over-emphasis on personal choice as obesity's cause.
- ✓ *Don't single out* students at higher weights. Pay attention to ensure they receive similar respect and opportunities compared to other students.

