

How to Talk to Kids about Weight and Obesity

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In today's culture, weight is an extraordinarily sensitive subject, especially for children and teens. Deciding how to approach weight issues with young people deserves careful attention; how you handle the topic can have serious and lifelong implications. Here are some tips for discussing weight with kids, and what to do if a child brings up the topic on his or her own.

1. **Don't Talk, Do Something:** In general, if your child is elementary age or younger and you're concerned about his or her weight, don't talk about it; just start making lifestyle changes as a family. The best thing you can do is make it easy for kids to eat smart and move often. Serve regular, balanced family meals and snacks. Turn off televisions, video games and computers. Look for ways to spend fun, active time together.

2. **Don't Play the Blame Game:** Never yell, scream, bribe, threaten or punish children about weight, food or physical activity. If you turn these issues into parent-child battlegrounds, the results can be disastrous. Shame, blame and anger are setups for failure. The worse children feel about their weight, the more likely they are to overeat or develop an [eating disorder](#).
3. **A United Front:** As with any other important issue, make sure both parents and other important relatives are on the same page. Mixed messages about weight can have unhealthy consequences.
4. **Talk with Your Health Care Provider:** If a health professional mentions a concern about your child's weight, speak with him or her privately. Discuss specific concerns about your child's growth pattern. Ask for ideas on making positive changes in your family eating habits and activity levels.
5. **Seek Advice:** For kids and teens, check out local programs and professionals who specialize in youth. Look for a registered dietitian nutritionist with a specialty in pediatric weight management. Many hospitals and clinics have comprehensive programs with education and activities for both kids and adult family members. Some of these options may be covered by your health insurance plan.
6. **Focus On the Big Picture:** The key is health, not weight. If your family starts eating better and moving more, your children may "grow into" their weight as their height increases. Compliment your children on lifestyle behaviors ("great snack choice" or "you really run fast") rather than on the loss of a pound or two.

What to Do if Your Child Says, "I'm So Fat"

Learn where the fat thoughts came from. Did a friend or classmate tease your child about weight? Did another relative mention the size of his or her belly or thighs? Was there something on television or online about overweight kids?

If another child or an adult is bullying your child, confront the situation directly and as soon as possible. If your child's weight, eating and activity are normal for his or her age, reassure your child and don't focus on weight.

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