

Parents: Talking to your kids about weight

Talking about weight is a sensitive issue, especially with children and adolescents. Here are some tips to keep in mind when talking to your child about weight and ideas for how to promote positive lifestyle changes at home.

1. Focus on healthy changes in your child's behavior (e.g., eating more fruits or vegetables, or drinking less soda) rather than just weight loss. Losing weight is difficult, and is not the only measure of success. Be sure to acknowledge and praise your child of the positive behavior changes that he or she is making.
2. Children are more likely to be successful in making healthy changes if the whole family is taking steps to make improvements in their lifestyles. Parents need to model healthy behaviors for their children, and create an environment at home that makes it easy to eat healthy and be physically active. Children will be better equipped to make changes if they are supported in this way.
3. Be aware of the language that you use about weight. Avoid labeling people as "fat" or "bad" or making negative stereotypes about people who are overweight. Use words like "above average weight" rather than "chubby" or "obese."
4. Be aware of comments that you make about your own body in front of your children. It's common, especially for women, to make negative comments about their bodies (e.g., "these pants make me look fat"). When children hear these comments, it can send a negative message about body image and self-esteem.
5. Avoid "should" statements with your children. For example, avoid making comments like "You shouldn't be eating that" or "You should be eating something healthier." If your child has made an unhealthy food choice, wait for an appropriate time to suggest an alternative or to model eating a healthier choice.
6. Encourage self-esteem in your child. It is important for you and your child to recognize that self-esteem comes from many sources – not just appearance. Celebrate your child's successes and behaviors that have nothing to do with their body, and be sure to compliment them on these qualities. (e.g., qualities like kindness, being a good friend, doing well on a school assignment, working hard to achieve a goal, taking good care of a pet, etc).
7. Identify triggers for your child's eating. People eat for many reasons besides hunger, including stress, feeling bored, angry, depressed or anxious. If you see this pattern occurring, talk to your child and learn what is going on and how you can help them cope with these feelings in healthier ways.
8. Be a support partner for your child. Be available to listen to your child during times of frustration, to help your child stay on track in making healthy changes, and to celebrate your child's successes, no matter how small they may seem.