

Ways for parents to combat weight bias

1. Challenge your personal assumptions about body weight

It's important as a parent to become aware of your own attitudes about weight:

- Do you make assumptions based on weight about a person's character, intelligence, or lifestyle behaviors?
- What are your views about the causes of obesity? How might these views affect your attitudes about people who are overweight?
- What are common stereotypes about obese persons? Do you believe these to be true or false? What are your reasons for this? Can you think of examples that challenge common stereotypes?

2. Communicate with sensitive and appropriate language

Avoid making negative comments about your own or other people's weight in front of your child, such as "These pants make me look fat", or "That person is too fat to be wearing that". Be careful not to express negative associations with being overweight (e.g., like being lazy), and instead of using words like "fat", use more sensitive words like "above average weight".

3. Intervene to reduce weight-based teasing and victimization

Be on the look-out for peer harassment, teasing, or victimization if your child is overweight. Overweight youth are often teased at school – and can include verbal teasing, physical bullying, or social rejection from peers. But remember, this can also happen at home with other family members. Talk to your child about these issues and find ways to intervene, offer support, and help your child cope.

4. Provide examples of overweight role models to your child

Children rarely see examples of positive role models who aren't thin. Help your child learn that many overweight individuals are successful and accomplish important goals. Find examples of people who challenge common weight-based stereotypes, and share these with your child.

5. Increase your understanding about the causes of obesity

Many people wrongly assume that people are obese because they are lazy. It's important to recognize that this perception is false, and to understand that obesity is an epidemic caused by a complex interaction of genetic, biological, environmental, and behavioral factors.

6. Emphasize the importance of health over thinness

Regardless of your child's weight, the goal is to improve his or her health through nutritious eating and physical activity. Be sure that your focus is on your child's health – and not just on their appearance or how much they weigh, which can put unfair pressure on your child and communicate that health is not as important as looks.

7. Increase awareness of bias and advocate weight tolerance

Try to promote awareness of weight bias in your child's school. Talk to your child's teachers or the school principal to express your concerns about this problem and to educate others. Schools can certainly benefit from messages of weight tolerance.