



PARENTS

WEIGHT BIAS: IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PARENTS



You may not be surprised to learn that many children and adolescents with high body weight are teased and made fun of by peers at school and through social media. This has damaging effects on children's emotional and physical well-being. But, did you know that parents can also be a source of weight bias?

Research studies show that as many as 47% of girls and 34% of boys with high body weight report that they are teased and victimized by family members*. Other research indicates that family members are frequent sources of weight bias – even more common than peers or classmates of children with high body weight. In a study that examined experiences of weight bias among 2400 women with high body weight, family members were the most frequently reported source of weight stigma, with 72% of adults reporting that they had experienced weight bias from family members, and 62% reporting that family members had stigmatized them about their weight on multiple occasions**.

In addition, weight-based comments from parents may have lasting impacts on children. Here are some quotes from adults reflecting on their experiences of weight bias***:

“I have been heavy for 55 years. The rejection by my parents still hurts. I often feel worthless and don't understand why people search me out.”

“This is such a deep seeded emotional issue. I was raised thinking I was fat, and you never really get over it!”

“I think the times when I felt stigmatized by someone important in my life have made the most lasting impact on how I feel about myself now. Those are the times I remember most clearly.”



“Even though I am 70 years old, I still remember my father expressing disgust about my weight.”

As a parent, it is important to be aware that even the most well-intentioned comments about your child's weight may have negative consequences. Unless your child initiates a conversation about body weight, it is best to avoid discussions about body weight directly and instead focus conversations on promoting healthy behaviors. For more information, please refer to our handout: Parents: Should you talk to your kids about weight?

If your child is having difficulty coping with the social and physical challenges of having high body weight, please refer to our handout: Ways for Parents to Combat Weight Bias.

*Eisenberg ME, Neumark-Sztainer D, & Story M. Associations of weight-based teasing and emotional well-being among adolescents. *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*. 2003; 157 733-738.

**Puhl R, Brownell KD. Confronting and Coping with Weight Stigma: An Investigation of Overweight and Obese Adults. *Obesity*. 2006;14:1802-1815.

***Pudney, E. V., Himmelstein, M. S., Puhl, R. M., & Foster, G.D. (2020). Distressed or not distressed? A mixed methods examination of reactions to weight stigma and implications for emotional wellbeing and internalized weight bias. *Social Science & Medicine*, 249, 112854. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.112854>