



HEALTHCARE
PROVIDERS

PEDIATRICIANS: HOW TO TALK TO PARENTS



UConn
RUDD CENTER
FOR FOOD POLICY & OBESITY

When treating a child with high body weight, it's important to provide parents with appropriate information and to address the topic of weight with sensitivity..


Here are some issues to consider:

1. Avoid blaming:

There can be a certain “stigma” towards parents of children with high body weight, as society often blames parents for causing their child’s weight gain. When parents feel blamed, they are less equipped to help their children, and more likely to be dissatisfied with pediatric care. Avoid using language that places blame on parents, while communicating to parents that they are an important part of the solution to improve their child’s health.

2. Focus on healthy behaviors

Providers can communicate to parents the importance of talking to their children about healthy eating habits and being active to stay healthy, rather than focusing on their child’s weight.



3. Make it a family affair:

It is difficult for a child to successfully improve their eating and exercise patterns if parents are not doing the same. Providers can encourage parents to make healthy lifestyle changes as a family, rather than imposing a certain health plan only on one child. Give parents examples of appropriate behavioral goals to set for their child, and for the family (e.g., eliminating intake of sugared sodas, or increasing consumption of vegetables). Encourage parents to have more frequent family meals and role model healthy behaviors for their children.

4. Approach weight sensitively:

If it is necessary to discuss weight, it is important that providers are mindful of the words they use to describe body weight, and to address the topic of weight with sensitivity. Providers can begin any weight-related conversation by first asking the parents and child for their permission to discuss the child's weight. If the parents and child agree to discuss weight, providers should consider asking the child for preferred terms to describe his/her weight. For example, some patients prefer that physicians avoid using the term obesity and would instead prefer terms such as 'high body weight' or 'high BMI'.

5. Inquire about a history of weight-based mistreatment or bullying:

It is common for children and adolescents with high body weight to experience weight-based mistreatment or bullying, and this can lead to serious physical and mental health consequences. Providers should assess youth for bullying-related issues and make referrals to mental health providers if appropriate. See additional resources below.

6. Have resources available:

Many parents may know that their child's eating and activity habits could be improved, but they may not know how best to help their child make such changes. Providers can guide parents to appropriate resources, and suggest specific steps that parents can implement to improve their child's eating habits and physical activity. See additional resources below.

Additional resources for pediatricians:

- American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement on Addressing Weight Stigma: <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/140/6/e20173034>
- <http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/weight-bias-stigma-health-care-providers>
- Change Talk: Childhood Obesity: An interactive role-play simulation for health professionals that builds their motivational interviewing skills to lead real-life conversations with parents and their children about healthy weight and childhood obesity. Scenarios cover the topics of sugary drinks, breastfeeding, and picky eating: <https://kognito.com/products/change-talk-childhood-obesity>
- The Importance of Addressing Weight-based Bullying with Your Pediatric Patients: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEtEKnQ58Ns&feature=youtu.be>

Resources and handouts for parents

- <http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/weight-bias-stigma-parents>
- https://ihcw.aap.org/Pages/Resources_ParentPt.aspx

Resources and handouts for kids and teens

- <http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/weight-bias-stigma-kids-and-teens>