



PARENTS

SHOULD YOU TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT WEIGHT?



If you are concerned about your child's weight, you may be wondering if you should talk to your child about it directly. Talking about weight is a sensitive issue, and children are particularly at risk of being negatively influenced by conversations and comments about their weight. Although these conversations are well-intentioned, it is recommended that parents avoid discussing weight with their children, and instead focus conversations around health rather than weight.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when talking to your child about making positive lifestyle changes at home:

- Focus conversations on healthy changes in your child's behavior (e.g., eating more fruits or vegetables, or drinking less soda) rather than weight loss. Be sure to acknowledge and praise your child of the positive behavior changes that he or she is making.
- 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 can model healthy behaviors for their children, and create an environment at home that makes it easy to eat healthy and be physically active.
- Be aware of the language that you use. Avoid labeling people as "fat" or "bad" or making negative stereotypes about people with high body weight. When describing the body weight of someone else, use descriptors like "high body weight" rather than "chubby" or "obese."

- **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.
 - **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.
 - **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 (e.g., kindness, being a good friend, doing well on a school assignment, working hard to achieve a goal, taking good care of a pet, etc.), and be sure to compliment them on these qualities.
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- **Identify triggers for your child's eating.** People eat for many reasons besides hunger, such as 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.
- **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.