

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT WEIGHT

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Are you concerned about your child's weight and don't know what to do? Here are some tips for discussing weight with kids and what to do if a child says, "I'm fat."



Don't Talk, Do Something: If you're concerned about your child's weight, start making healthier lifestyle changes as a family. Serve low fat, balanced meals and snacks with plenty of fruits and vegetables. Look for ways to spend fun, active time together. Be a role model for healthy living.

Don't Blame: Never yell, bribe, threaten or punish children about weight, food or physical activity. Shame, blame and anger lead to failure. The worse children feel about their weight, the more likely they are to overeat or develop an eating disorder.

A United Front: Both parents and relatives should agree on sending positive messages to kids about their weight and how they are going to approach it. Mixed messages about weight can have unhealthy consequences.

Seek Advice: Speak with your health professional about your concerns privately. Ask for ideas on making positive changes in your family. Check out local programs, hospitals and clinics that have comprehensive programs with education and activities for both kids and adult family members. Look for a registered dietitian with a specialty in pediatric weight management.

What to Do If Your Child Says, "I'm Fat"

- Find out where the fat thoughts came from. Did a friend or classmate tease them about their weight? Did a relative or coach encourage them to lose weight?
- Listen to your child's concern and if the child's weight is normal for his/her age, reassure them that their weight is fine. Help them by adding more nutritious foods and enrolling them in sports or activities they enjoy. Have them focus on getting healthier and fit instead of on their weight.
- Avoid using terms like "skinny" and "fat."
- Explain to your child that people come in all shapes and sizes.
- Help your child wear more flattering clothes, so they feel good about themselves. Don't comment, "if you lost weight, you could wear nicer clothes."
- Compliment your child on positive lifestyle behaviors ("Great snack choice," or "You really run fast") rather than on the loss of a pound or two.

Sometimes you try to do everything to help your child, but he/she may still grow up overweight. It is important that your child feels loved and that it is not their fault so that they are not obsessed with weight loss throughout their life. Continue to provide a positive feeding environment and encourage an active life.