

## Talking to Kids about Weight

Experts recognize that the intense focus on childhood obesity has some potential downsides, including the increase in eating problems among youth of all ages and backgrounds. If you are concerned about a child's weight, here is what the research says are the positive ways to "do no harm" as you are trying to help.

### What the research says

Several recent studies and surveys have looked at the issue of weight management from the point of view of young people. There is some evidence to suggest that:

- Teens may want their parents to be sensitive when talking about weight. They prefer an indirect or "cautious" approach. In other words, they want adults to talk (and model) healthy lifestyles without focusing on body weight, shape, or size specifically.
- Young people can pick up feelings about weight and dieting from adults. When parents are dissatisfied with their bodies and practice unhealthy dieting behaviors, youth tend to feel worse about their bodies and do the same unhealthy things.
- Extreme weight control and eating disorders among teen girls may increase when their parents talk about weight, dieted, and/or encouraged dieting. Children who were teased about their weight had higher BMIs (Body Mass Index) and more extreme diets.

### What your family can do

#### Model healthy behaviors for young people.

- The best approach is to focus on healthy habits rather than on weight, scales, or BMI numbers. Whatever their size, all kids benefit from eating smarter and moving more.
- Research clearly shows that parents make a difference. Stop the "diet talk" and begin to showcase the eating and activity habits that you want your children to practice.

#### Make healthy choices easy, fun, and tasty.

- Regular family mealtimes are one of the best ways to help everybody enjoy nutrition and better health at any weight. Breakfast, lunch or dinner - eat together when you can.
- Make a healthy lifestyle part of every day. Plan nutrient-rich meals together. Prepare tasty snacks together. Play active games together. Invite their friends to join in the fun.

#### Listen more, talk less, and never tease.

- Listen carefully when a child wants to talk about weight or body image issues. Find out if they are being bullied. Do not allow any weight-related teasing in your home.
- **Bottom line:** Help all children learn that everyone's body is special and deserves to be treated well with healthful food, enjoyable physical activity, and positive self-talk.