

FACTSHEET

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How to talk to your child about their weight: a guide for parents and carer

Talking to children about their weight can be difficult. However, weight is an important part of health, so if there is an issue it should be talked about.

- Remember to focus on healthy changes in behavior. Remind your child of the positive things that you are all doing as a family.
- See the Fact Sheet on “Losing Weight - why the whole family needs to be involved” for reasons why it’s better that a healthy lifestyle applies to the whole family. Children and teenagers are best able to make changes when they feel well supported and are not the only one being “targeted”
- Unless advised by a health professional, focus on “health and a healthy lifestyle” rather than weight loss. Remember, it can be difficult for children to lose weight!
- Try not to label people as “fat” or “good” or “bad.” Use phrases like “not a healthy weight for their age” or “above average weight” rather than words like “chunky” or “obese.”
- Whatever your child’s weight, there are things you can do to help their self-esteem. Praise them, give compliments and encourage qualities which are not related to their appearance. For example “I like the way you handled that big school assignment,” “I feel proud when you look after the younger kids so well” and “It’s great that you were calm before your talk.”
- Try not to slip in negative-sounding comments like “Don’t you think you should...” or “You shouldn’t be having that.” Kids interpret this as nagging and are less likely to do what you want them to do.
- Watch the negative comments you make about your own body. Children and teenagers will pick up if you are checking body parts in the mirror and saying “My bottom looks big in this.”
- Don’t compare bodies or allow your child to do the same.
- If your child or teenager makes an unhealthy food choice, don’t make a big deal. Wait until the right time to talk about what they could have done differently.
- People eat for reasons other than hunger. Children may eat to combat stress, boredom or to comfort

themselves when feeling anxious or sad. Talk to your child about what is going on with them so that they will be less likely to emotionally eat.

- Feeling “fat” is usually about something else. Kids may not be able to say that they are feeling insecure, worried or down on themselves. If the time is right, talk to them on whether anything has happened and how they are feeling – other than “fat”.
- It is possible that an overweight child or teenager is experiencing teasing or negative comments about their weight. Help them to express their feelings about this and encourage self-esteem in other areas.
- Don’t allow your child to follow fad diets. Healthy lifestyle changes with eating and activity are for the whole family. Fad diets can lead to disordered eating, poor self-esteem and more weight gain overtime (the opposite of what you are trying to achieve!).

Remember:

- Don’t label or make negative comments about people’s bodies including your own.
- At times your child may choose to eat junk foods or to not be active. That’s part of being a kid!
- Fad diets are unnecessary and unhelpful for children and teenagers.
- You can make many important changes which will make healthy eating and activity choices easier (see the Fact Sheet on [“Weight Management Tips for Parents and Carers”](#) for more details).