

## Tips For Helping An Overweight Child

from the American Counseling Association

Health experts identify obesity as the number one health issue facing American children. Current statistics from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that more than one-third of children are overweight or obese. It's a condition that not only brings increased health risks, but also can subject a child to taunting and discrimination.

Dealing with a child's weight problems is never easy, but there are a number of things that parents can do that can make reaching and maintaining a healthy weight a more attainable goal.

A starting point is not to be the food police. Restricting or constantly lecturing about food choices can leave a child feeling deprived, different, controlled and rebellious. The result can be lowered self-esteem and eating habits that may include hiding food or binging on restricted foods.

Instead, give your child an active role in food choices. Help your child learn about healthy food choices and include him or her on shopping trips to the market. Don't automatically say "no" to poor food choices, but instead gently teach your child how to balance less desirable food choices with healthier ones.

An overweight child doesn't need lectures about his or her weight. Instead, teach your child to have a realistic view of the world and himself or herself. We aren't all supposed to look like models or movie stars. Healthy people come in a variety of sizes and shapes. Finding a healthy weight is the goal you want.

It's also important to be a positive role model for your child. Make dinner a family affair with everyone taking reasonable portions and having a choice of healthy foods. Don't lecture about healthy snack choices, but instead set the example by reaching for that piece of fruit yourself.

Staying active should be a family goal. A family walk, bike ride or ball game works off excess calories, provides communication opportunities, and has overall health benefits for your child and the entire family.

Encourage communications. Often, we use food to make us feel calmer, to hide anger or to avoid problems. Teaching your child that there are other ways to deal with issues besides the refrigerator can help overcome the emotional eating problems so many children face.

If you feel excessive weight is a significant problem for your child, talk to his or her physician about possible options or see a professional counselor specializing in children.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org*

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