

How To Help Someone Losing Weight

from the American Counseling Association

As always, the most common New Year's Resolution is to lose weight. And while trimming that waistline may seem a solo job, the truth is that family and friends can have an enormous influence on the success or failure of someone's weight loss efforts.

If you're trying to help someone you care about lose weight, here are some things NOT to do:

1. Don't be the food police.
2. Don't buy exercise equipment or point out new diets.
3. Don't cite health risks of being overweight, or seek constant weight loss updates.
4. Don't try to deprive the person of favorite foods.
5. Don't tell the person that weight loss is easy and just a matter of willpower.

Such actions send destructive messages which re-enforce the person's negative feelings that something is wrong with them unless they lose weight. The result can be additional eating as a way to temporarily overcome those negative feelings.

Instead, try practicing positive behaviors that can help the weight loss effort:

1. Encourage the person trying to lose weight to express feelings, especially negative ones that may be triggering over-eating.

2. Offer ongoing encouragement, not about weight loss but about the person in general. Give sincere, honest, positive messages. Negative feelings that trigger eating are often tied to low self-esteem and being unhappy with one's appearance and life. Find areas of the person's actions, personality and appearance where you can offer positive support.

3. Help the person refocus on what may be the real problem. Weight gain is often a reaction to issues such as relationship problems, a bad work situation, a family loss or other major concerns. Remind the person that we all eat when stressed because food does make us feel temporarily better. Helping identify stress sources can minimize that need to feel better with food.

4. Be a positive model. This doesn't mean you have to diet yourself, but rather that you set an example, without lecturing, by making healthy, sensible food choices. Similarly, start or continue exercising and invite the person you wish to help to join you. Make it a positive experience.

Losing weight is never easy, especially when there are problems and stresses that helped trigger the weight gain. But being someone who truly understands the problem and is willing to care and listen, rather than lecture about weight, can go a long way in helping promote weight loss.

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