

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

Positive Ways To Help An Overweight Child

from the American Counseling Association

There have been numerous reports about the situation of overweight and obese children in this country. It can be a difficult subject to approach when your own child is facing weight issues, but there are positive ways to help your child deal with this problem.

No weight control lecture is necessary. Your child is aware of his or her weight issues, just the same as you are if you happen to be overweight yourself. Instead, start by giving your child positive thoughts. Express your love and make it clear that everyone is different. The goal isn't to look like some magazine model.

Creating a good mindset is essential. Emotional triggers often have us turning to food for its calming effect and how it makes us feel better. Teach your child that feelings have a purpose and can serve as clues to what is really going on. Encourage your child to talk with you when feeling troubled, and discuss how to handle problems besides hiding one's emotions behind food.

Try to encourage positive thinking in your child, teaching them how to ignore or react in a good way to negative messages. But you also want to encourage actions that can lead to a healthier weight.

Rather than being the food police, forbidding or restricting food choices, make your child part of the food choice process. Take your child shopping with you to learn about good nutrition. Even a younger child can learn to read the nutrition label on foods. Emphasize the taste and benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables and encourage your child to come up with ideas on how to serve these nutritious choices.

Exercise, of course, is an essential part of weight control, but it should be activities that are fun and enjoyable, not a grueling punishment. Ordering someone to go and "play" is usually counterproductive, but going out together with your child to toss a ball, walk the dog or ride a bike makes it fun and beneficial for both of you.

Similarly, make mealtimes a family affair with everyone getting involved in healthier eating. Kids learn by example and if Mom and Dad are eating large portions and going back for seconds, guess who is going to want the same?

And if there are family issues that might be leading to stress and an eating disorder, consider talking to a professional counselor for expert help.

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association.
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