

Suggestions For Helping An Overweight Child

from the American Counseling Association

The U.S. Center for Disease Control reports that as many as one-third of American children are overweight or obese. That's a problem that not only brings increased health risks, but also can subject a child to taunting, discrimination, and self-confidence issues.

A starting point for helping your child is to be your child's friend in regard to weight issues. Don't lecture your child about his or her weight, or act like the food police restricting food choices. Lectures and restrictions can leave a child feeling deprived, different and controlled. The result can be lowered self-esteem and eating habits that may include hiding food or binging on restricted foods.

Instead, listen to your child's concerns about his or her weight, then try to be a guide to healthier eating and a healthier weight. 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.

Rather than lectures about weight, teach your child to have a realistic view of the world and him or herself. We aren't all supposed to look like models or movie stars. Healthy people come in a variety of sizes and shapes.

Probably most important step is being a positive role model. Make dinner a family affair with everyone taking reasonable portions and having a choice of healthy foods. Don't lecture about healthy snack choices, instead set the example by reaching for that piece of fruit yourself.

And make being active a family goal. A family walk, bike ride, or ball game can work off excess calories, offer communication opportunities, and provide health benefits for the entire family.

Communication is important. 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.

There can be many reasons why a child is overweight. If you feel excessive weight is a significant problem for your child, talk to his or her physician about possible options. A professional counselor specializing in children and family issues can also offer help in dealing with this issue.

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