

Talking About Weight and Food Around Kids

The way adults talk and act around kids matters. Sometimes adults say things about weight or food that can make kids feel bad about their body or what they eat, without knowing the harm. The good news is that parents and caregivers can make a difference with just a few small changes.

Being careful with how we talk about weight and food does not mean that eating well is not important. Eating well is needed for kids to grow and become their best self. We can still talk about these topics with our kids, but not during eating times and when kids are ready to learn about it.

Note: You may need to simplify or enhance word choice depending on the age of your child.

Talking About Weight

Instead of saying...

Say...

"Wow, Aunt Brenda looks great with her weight loss."

Nothing about people's weight change.

"Yes, Aunt Brenda's body looks like it has changed. Sometimes weight changes for different reasons. People can be healthy at all different sizes."

"I could lose 10 lbs."

Nothing about weight loss. When kids hear others talk about weight loss, it can make them consider if weight loss is needed for their body too.

"I go to the gym so that I can gain muscle and look fit."

"I go to the gym because exercise makes my mind and body feel good. I exercise so that I can keep my body working the way I want it to."

"If Joe just ate better, he wouldn't be so heavy."

Nothing about people's weight change.

"People eat the way they do for all different reasons, not just for health and body size. We don't know about the reasons someone is eating the way they are and we shouldn't judge their choices."

"I could keep up with you if I were in better shape."

"When I was a kid, I moved just as fast as you. As I get older, I have slowed down a bit, but my body still works for what I need it to. I am thankful for the work my body does for me."

"You're not fat!"
When your child says...
"I'm fat!"

"What made you feel this way and what do you think that means? Some people use the word fat in a mean way, to hurt people's feelings. Bodies can be healthy and beautiful at all sizes." (Explore any follow up that may be needed if bullying is identified.)

Talking About Food

Instead of saying...

Say...

"If you eat your broccoli, you can watch TV tonight"

"Hey, let's play a game about your dinner. Can you describe what you think broccoli tastes, feels, smells and looks like without using the words yuck or yum? Can you think of a food that tastes similar to broccoli? (Play this game with other foods too, not just the ones you are trying to get them to eat more of.)"

The point of this game is to provide neutral exposure to the foods without any pressure to eat it. It also does not use food as a bribe, which can make kids want to eat it even less without being rewarded.

"You can come with me to the grocery store, but you can only pick out one treat."

"You can come to the grocery store with me if you want. You can pick the cookies and some fruit."

Call food what it is. Avoid labels like "treats".

"I don't think you need that extra serving of pasta, you've eaten a lot."

Do not comment on portion sizes or servings - even when it seems like a lot.

Kids appetites vary day to day. Outside of eating times you can talk about and practice mindful eating together and listening to your body's hunger and fullness cues. Remove distractions and technology while eating and try to eat together as a family as much as possible.

"You need to make healthier food choices."

"As your parent, it is my role to choose what food to offer you and when. You can choose how much and if you want to eat it. If you chose not to eat the food that I serve, that is up to you."

Teaching young kids about nutrition and letting them be in charge of making their own food choices can lead to negative relationships with food. Wait until they are ready to introduce these topics and roles.

For more information on nutrition and additional resources, please visit



bchu.org/nutrition

