



TALKING HEALTH WITH KIDS

Raising children to be healthy adults is an admirable parental goal. Yet, sometimes even the best intentions can instill a negative body image in children and actually engrain stigma, self-doubt and less-than-healthy habits they might carry into adulthood.

When discussing healthy food choices and physical activity, a parents attitude and past experience with can seep into the conversation. Ensure you're not passing down issues like poor body image, labeling foods as “bad” and “good” and using exercise as punishment.

Use these tips to positively communicate with children about physical activity.

Increasing Activity: Rather than a strict fitness regimen, focus on play and having fun together as the main reason kids are active. Avoid using physical activity as punishment, especially as a means to “work off” a higher calorie treat the family enjoyed. Instill a love of play and the outdoors to create a lasting love of movement.

Decreasing Sedentary Time: If your child does not enjoy regimented exercise or sport, try to focus on decreasing sedentary time. Spread out chores throughout the day, make TV commercial breaks active and enforce stretch breaks for every hour of uninterrupted sitting. Be sure to provide praise when they engage in activity on their own, rather than reprimand excess sitting, and work together to find something active that is enjoyable for the whole family as a reward.

To promote wellbeing to your children, focus on healthy behaviors and habits rather than body size. Discouraging children from using negative language to describe themselves can help shift the focus from scrutinizing their size and shape to celebrating their healthy choices. Encouraging body positivity within children starts with promoting positive self-image. Children often mirror what they see you do and hear you say. Modeling positive healthy behavior can help your children develop lifelong healthy habits.





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Dietitians often hear clients say things like, "As a kid I had to sit at the table until I finished my peas and I still HATE peas!" The tone of our upbringing can greatly sway our thoughts and habits about healthy food choices later in life. Adopt a positive approach for your kids, and yourself!

INSTEAD OF...

Enforcing a "Clean Plate Club" or requiring a child to finish everything before they leave the table...

Labeling healthy foods or behaviors as "good" and less healthy foods or choices "bad"...

Shaming yourself or talking about choices you regret in front of your kids...

TRY...

Asking your child to reflect on how their body feels. Ask, "What is your stomach telling you?" Child are born with the natural ability to judge how much energy they need. Encourage a positive hunger scale assessment!

Focusing on action words like "Bananas are an energy food! Eggs are a muscle food!" For less healthy items, enjoy them as "sometimes foods" and teach that our bodies would miss the muscle and energy foods if we ate cake all the time!

Regrouping with the next healthy choice. Make a stir fry together, teach them how to cut vegetables, plant herbs, shake a vinaigrette. You're working toward your health goals without body or choice shaming, and they're having fun with food! Win win!

Table Top Strategies: Try serving meals family style. If there's a food you'd like children to only have one serving of, change how much is on the table and set out extra healthier items. "If you're still hungry you may have more green beans." If serving dessert, many experts recommend placing it on the table at dinnertime in small portions. It neutralizes the power of the treat food. If you're serving a new or unfamiliar food, try to also serve at least ONE food you know your child will eat. Lastly, if a child doesn't eat or doesn't eat much, refrain from offering a second choice. They can eat at the next meal or snack.

Lastly, WE are never "good/bad" because of what chose to eat. Avoid comments like "I was so good at dinner, I only had the spinach salad!" or "I'm so bad...I ate TWO brownies." Keep it positive, focus on fueling and most importantly ENJOY all the flavors food has to offer.

