

Let's Make Schools Safe For Every Body!

Diet talk is so engrained into our culture, which makes sense as to why it is a part of our schools and the school activities. Weight bias jeopardizes kids' emotional and physical health. To help create a safe, weight neutral environment for our kid's, administrators and teachers can change this culture and protect our kids by focusing on making the school activities not only diet talk free but body positive as well.

Where do we start?

- Be alert to incidences of weight bias, understand your own attitudes, and those of your children and/or students. Be aware of the language that you use about weight. Avoid labeling people as "fat" or "bad" or making negative stereotypes about people who are overweight
- Avoid "Fat-Talk". Be careful of how you discuss weight in the presence of children. Use sensitive and appropriate language. Avoid "should" statements with your students. For example, avoid making comments like "You shouldn't be eating that" or "You should be eating something healthier."
- Talk positively about your own body in front of the students.
- Refrain from labeling foods as "junk, bad or unhealthy" on the school campus.
- Allow kids to regulate their eating by allowing them to decide how they eat and how much they eat.
- Encourage self-esteem in your student. It is important for kids to recognize that self-esteem comes from many sources – not appearance. Celebrate their successes and behaviors that have nothing to do with their body and be sure to compliment them on these qualities. (e.g., qualities like kindness, being a good friend, doing well on a school assignment, working hard to achieve a goal, taking good care of a pet, etc).

Teachers, remind kids and adolescents that they are still growing and that they need to eat enough to support their activity and growth. Talk about what bodies do, rather than what they look like. Talk about foods in a neutral way, rather than talking about foods being "good" or "bad." Focus on where food comes from and offer fun food exposure experiences in the classroom. Remember it is the job of the parents to decide what the kids bring to school, and it is the job of the kids to determine how much they eat and what they are going to eat.

Weight Bias

When kids are teasing or bullying others because of their weight, they may not realize how harmful their behavior is. Weight bias has become so ingrained in our society that kids sometimes reflect what they have witnessed elsewhere. Let the student know that their behavior is inappropriate without making them feel embarrassed. Weight bias can be expressed in both direct and indirect ways. Be aware of these behaviors among your students:

- Verbal comments such as name-calling, derogatory remarks, teasing, or joking directed at overweight students
- Social exclusion such as ignoring or not including overweight students in activities
- Physical aggression such as shoving or physically intimidating an overweight student
- Humiliation of an overweight student through spreading rumors or cyber-bullying

Tips for Reducing Weight Bias

- **Celebrate all bodies! No matter what size they are.**
- Educate Yourself. Understand the multiple complex causes of weight gain so you don't make false assumptions about people





who are in a larger body. Remember that genetic, biological, environmental & behavioral factors all contribute to body size.

- Treat the importance of weight tolerance as you would racial or religious tolerance
- The goal for all children is improved health through balanced eating and activity regardless of their weight
- Encourage students of all weights to participate in sports teams, student council, talent shows and all extracurricular activities.
- Challenge negative stereotypes that place blame and stigma on larger bodied individuals.
- Increase awareness of how the media perpetuates weight bias; The media stereotypes overweight individuals and communicates unrealistic ideals of

thinness.

- Use examples of weight bias to evoke empathy in your students
- Discuss examples of weight bias among youth and encourage students to intervene and stand up for their peers
- Are the desks or chairs in your classroom large enough to accommodate your larger bodied students?
- Challenge your own assumptions about body weight.

Sadly, we forget that kids are supposed to be gaining weight during their elementary and adolescent years. Kids can't change the genes that will determine how tall they will be or when puberty start. Kids are born with the ability to intuitively regulate their intake by determining when they are feeling hungry and full.

Research Facts:

- Kids, on average, gain 40 pounds in the 4 years around puberty.
- Girls' body fat percentage increases by 120% during puberty.
- 2 out of 3, 13-year-old girls are fearful of gaining weight.
- Kids are fearful of gaining weight when they need to be gaining weight and become aware of their bodies/weight as young as 5-8 years old.

References/Resources:

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