

New guide to open up conversations between parents and kids about weight

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"Don't criticise your own weight when talking to children about healthy eating," say the team behind the new Bath—BDA resource. Credit: World Obesity Federation

When is the right time and what is the best way to go about talking to children about their weight?

A new resource, authored by researchers at the University of Bath with

the British Dietetic Association (BDA) Obesity and Pediatric Specialist Groups, hopes to help overcome some of these challenging questions faced by many parents and caregivers.

Reducing [childhood obesity](#) in the U.K. is a growing challenge. NHS Digital data from 2021 found that there was a substantial rise in the number of children living with obesity in England during the pandemic. Currently, in the last year of primary school (Year 6) more than a quarter of all children are living with obesity, and rates are highest in the poorest areas.

In 1990, just 5% of children in year 6 would have been classified as living with [obesity](#), which highlights a marked increase in the past 30 years.

Helping more children to achieve a healthy [weight](#) can reduce their risk of developing diseases, such as diabetes or hypertension, in later life. Physical activity and [healthy eating](#) can also help to improve children's self-esteem and well-being, so are important to encourage in their own right, as well as for maintaining a healthy weight.

Acknowledging that some parents may be concerned about how to avoid making children feel bad about themselves when talking about weight, the researchers behind the guidance "[Talking to your child about weight](#)," offer practical suggestions that can help frame these conversations more positively.

It covers themes such as understanding what influences children's thoughts around weight, reducing blame, and talking more positively about food and [physical activity](#) in the home and family setting. The guidance was developed by combining extensive research with expert input, including the views of children and parents.

One important takeaway, it suggests, is for parents to avoid criticizing their own weight or appearance and that of other people. When they do this, children listen, and it can make them think this is how they will be judged.

While there are times when parents may need to talk about weight, it suggests that framing conversations around the need for changes to help children grow and be healthy may help to avoid them becoming worried about their weight.

Finally, it suggests that other people who look after children regularly, such as grandparents, can help too. For example, children will understand better if they get the same messages from everyone. Another suggestion is the idea of choosing food and activities together.

Lead researcher, Professor Fiona Gillison of the Department for Health at the University of Bath, explained: "Creating the guidance has been the result of many years of work to try and reduce some of the anxiety, and help families to have open and constructive conversations about weight—if and when they need to. It is great to see it finally published, and we hope it will be helpful to many parents and caregivers who want to support their children around this topic."

Dr. Laura Stewart, a member of the British Dietetic Association (BDA) Obesity Specialist Group said, "Registered dietitians understand the importance of supporting parents in discussing the topic of weight with their [children](#). The BDA's Obesity and Pediatric Specialist Groups were pleased to work with the University of Bath on getting this new resource available for parents. We are glad that it will be widely available to help with open and constructive family conversations."

Provided by University of Bath

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