

## Good Information for Parents and Staff

### Overweight Children- Are Parents Concerned?

Parade Magazine recently published an article, ***Weight and Kids: The Hardest Conversation?***, Nov. 6, 2011 addressing the issue of children and weight. According to a recent survey, it was “found that parents are more **uncomfortable** talking to their kids about weight than about sex, drugs, or alcohol.” Parenting psychologist, Susan Bartell, offers information and suggestions regarding the topic of weight.

### Why is the subject of weight so hard for parents to bring up with their kids?

Many parents themselves might be overweight and worry that such a discussion will seem hypocritical. Others worry about such sensitive conversations possibly triggering a meltdown or eating disorder for their child. Other parents don't realize childhood weight problems and poor eating habits have serious long term effects. An earlier study on this topic found that “nearly half of parents with overweight or obese children believed the child was at a healthy weight.”

### What is the right approach to have a weight discussion?

Dr. Bartell says you don't want to come out and say something hurtful, such as, “You're overweight,” and put your kid on a diet. A better approach is to make it a family affair for all to start getting healthier together, and suggest doing it little by little. Also, cover other areas besides food. Other factors, like reducing stress, or getting a good night's sleep, and more exercise contribute to weight loss.

### Parents have weight problems, too.

It's okay to admit you're not perfect and haven't been able to figure this out yourself. Then encourage your child or the whole family to work

together so they don't have to struggle like you have.

### Should you have your pediatrician talk to your child?

Conversations about weight can be tricky even for health care professionals. You might want to talk to the doctor first to feel out what he/she might say. Telling your child to lose 20lbs. is not helpful. An 8 or 9 year-old won't know what to do with that advice, and could feel hurt and embarrassed. However, if a doctor talks to your child about how important a healthy heart and other organs are, and how extra weight can harm your child's heart, this might help your child see the doctor's concern and the seriousness of the problem.

### Some final thoughts:

- Parents often think that soccer, baseball, and other organized sports is exercise enough for kids in their early school years, and these activities are sufficient to establish good habits of regular exercise and fitness. **Wrong.** Although all these sports are great fitness boosters while the kids are in school, they do not usually transfer to the lives of most high school and young adults. Kids need to learn fitness routines that can be done regularly, most anywhere and throughout their lifespan.
- Most people who do not play in rigorous organized sports weekly, or exercise for 30-60 minutes a day, probably are overweight.
- Dieting rarely works without daily exercise, and whatever your present level of **input** (eating) and **output** (exercise), input needs to *reduce and refine* (i.e., eat less and better), and the output needs to *increase and refine* (more often and longer, and more specific, ex. cardio).

For help putting your kids on the path to better health, check out a new website from WebMD called Fit ([fit.webmd.com](http://fit.webmd.com)), dedicated to reducing childhood obesity. This site offers separate destinations for preschoolers, primary age, and teens; and parents can log on to [www.webmd.com/raisingfitkids](http://www.webmd.com/raisingfitkids)