

## Pediatricians: How to Talk to Parents

When treating an overweight or obese child, it's important to provide parents with appropriate information and to address the topic of weight with sensitivity. Here are some issues to consider:

1. **Educate parents:** Many parents do not have an accurate perception of their child's weight. As a provider, it is important to educate parents about BMI, and to explain the associated health risks at different BMI levels.
2. **Avoid blaming:** There is a certain "stigma" towards parents of overweight children, who are often blamed in society for causing their child's obesity. When parents feel blamed, they are less equipped to help their children, and more likely to be dissatisfied with pediatric care. Avoid using language that places blame on parents, while communicating to parents that they are an important part of the solution to improve their child's health.
3. **Approach weight sensitively:** When talking about weight with parents, and in front of children, certain words that are used to describe body weight can be offensive. As a provider it is important to be mindful of the language you use, and to address the topic of weight with sensitivity. You may want to begin by asking the parents and child for their permission to discuss the child's weight. You can also ask the child for preferred terms to describe his/her weight.
4. **Have resources available:** Many parents know that their child needs to lose weight, but lack the information to determine how best to help their child. Providers can guide parents to appropriate resources, and suggest specific steps that parents can implement to improve their child's eating habits and physical activity.
5. **Make it a family affair:** It is difficult for a child to successfully improve their eating and exercise patterns if parents are not doing the same. Providers can encourage parents to make healthy lifestyle changes as a family, rather than imposing a certain health plan only on the child. Give parents examples of appropriate behavioral goals to set for their child, and for the family (e.g., eliminating intake of sugared sodas, or increasing consumption of vegetables).
6. **Focus on healthy behaviors:** Explain the importance of setting realistic behavior change goals, and monitoring progress. Emphasize to parents the importance of focusing on healthy behaviors in their child, rather than just how much their child weighs. Providers can communicate to parents the importance of providing ongoing positive reinforcement for improvements in their child's health behaviors.

For more information on weight bias, please visit  
[www.YaleRuddCenter.org](http://www.YaleRuddCenter.org)

