

Teens: Are you being bullied because of your weight?

The following is a list of the range of bullying experiences that some people go through. Have you ever experienced any of these?

- Being called names
- Being made fun of
- Getting comments about your weight or appearance
- Receiving harassing phone calls, emails, or text messages
- Receiving verbal threats
- Having rumors spread about you
- Being excluded from school or social activities
- Being ignored
- Being humiliated in public
- Being pushed, tripped, or elbowed
- Being physically assaulted
- Being spit on
- Having your property stolen or damaged

If you are experiencing anything like these types of bullying because of your weight, remember that it's *not* your fault, you *don't* deserve it, and there *is* something you can do about it.

Weight-related bullying or teasing happens to a lot of people in many different settings – in school, at home, on the job, in doctor's offices and even between friends. Just because it's common doesn't mean it's acceptable. In fact, weight-related bullying (also known as weight bias, weight stigma, or weight discrimination) is very *unacceptable*. Being teased or bullied because of your weight is just as wrong as being made fun of because of your race, gender, or religion.

Why do people bully about weight?

There are a lot of reasons why some people bully. They may see it as a way of being popular, or making themselves look in-charge and confident. Some bullies do it to get attention or to put on a show for others. They may also be a victim of being bullied themselves, and bullying others makes them feel powerful. Bullies can often be insecure, but they will never let anyone see it. Bullies often don't even think about how it makes their victims feel or understand how wrong their behavior is.

People are more likely to make mean comments about weight if they believe that being overweight is a person's fault. In reality, being overweight is caused by a lot of factors – like genetics, human biology, and our environment. It's not just about "personal choice." Body weight is very complex and being blamed for being overweight only creates more weight stigma. Bullying someone or making them feel bad about themselves for their weight or personal appearance never has a positive outcome. In fact, recent studies have found that weight bullying can even make

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physical health worse by causing people to adopt unhealthy eating patterns and avoid physical activity.

Regardless of why people bully about weight, remember that it's *not* your fault and you *don't* deserve to be treated that way!

🍎 What are the consequences of being teased about weight?

When people are bullied and teased about their weight, it's common to feel down and ashamed. Sometimes this leads to feelings of depression, low self-esteem, and poor body image. It can make people want to avoid being around others, or withdraw from their usual activities. If you are feeling any of these emotions, talk to a family member, teacher, or another adult who can offer support and guidance.

🍎 What can you do?

If you are being teased at school:

- It's better not to fight back or retaliate. Bullies want to get a reaction out of you. If you stay calm, ignore them, and remove yourself from the situation, it will become boring for them and they will be more likely to leave you alone in the future.
- Project confidence! If you look unsure of yourself, you are more of a target. Hold your head up high and stand tall.
- Stay close to a friend. You are less likely to be a target if you are with another person.
- Help someone else who is being bullied. You're not only doing the right thing, but you might make a good friend in the process.
- Don't be afraid to tell an adult you trust; they can help you to find a solution or just listen. This is not "tattling". Bullying needs to be taken seriously, and sometimes the best solution is getting help from adults.

If you are being teased at home or with a friend:

- Let your friends and family members know that their words or actions are hurtful to you, and are in no way helping you. Tell them that when they comment about your weight, it makes you feel bad and doesn't motivate you in a positive way.
- Suggest to your friend or family member that you do something healthy together every week, like going for a walk or cooking a healthy meal. You can teach them being overweight doesn't mean being unhealthy.

Check out our other handouts for Teens: *What about Weight?* and *Web Resources for Teenagers*

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