

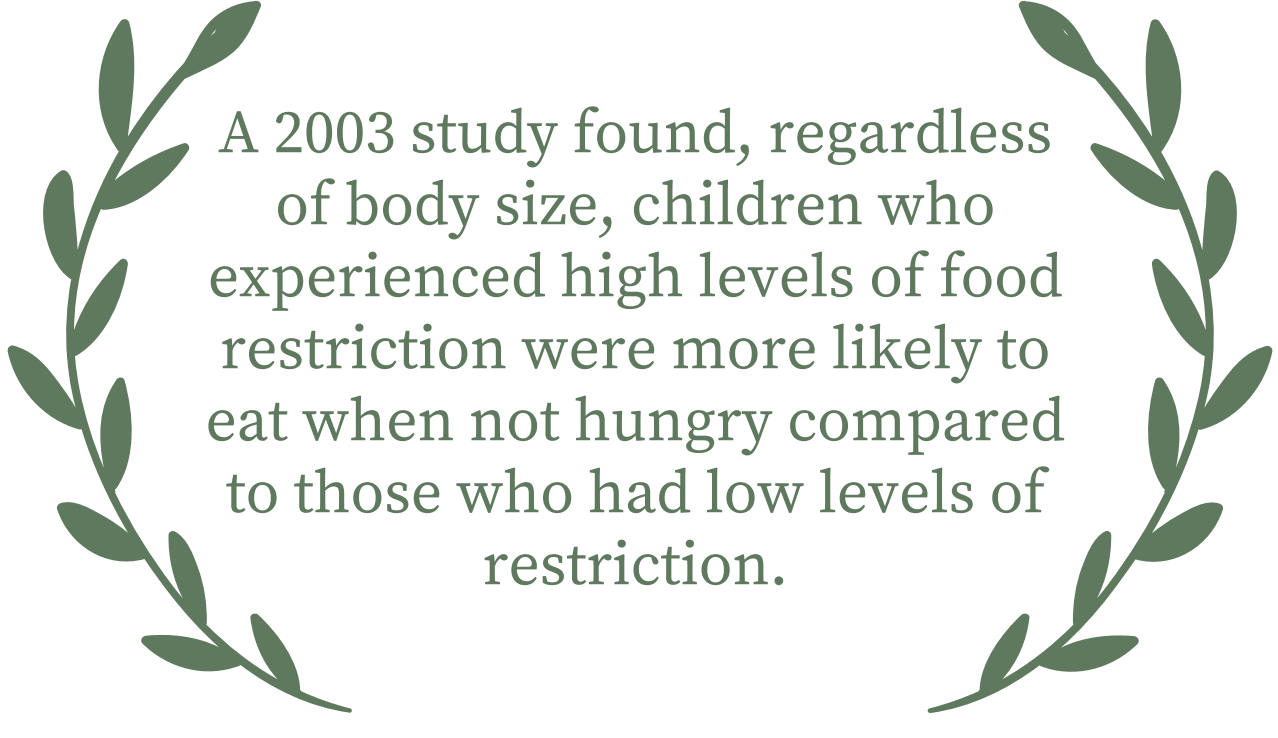
HELPING YOUR CHILD CULTIVATE A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD & BODY

Parents want what is best for their children's health, but this may lead to parents controlling their children's eating as a way to manage their weight, food intake, or overall nutrition. However, research shows that restrictive eating is associated with increased food seeking behaviors, emotional eating, and binge eating.

We are all born with the ability to eat intuitively, which is a flexible eating practice that honors physical and mental health. Physical hunger, satiety cues, taste preference, and desires guide when, what, and how much to eat. This model of eating is based on trust and helps to build autonomy over the body and eating. However, children begin to rely on external sources of validation, including commentary and calories, as opposed to their natural intuitive cues when their eating is restricted or controlled.

Similarly to controlling a child's food intake, making either positive or negative comments about physical appearance can lead to poor body image.

Fat-phobia is the discrimination against people based on their perceived body size which may lead to body shame, body hatred, disordered eating, and eating disorders.

A text box with a decorative border of green leaves and stems. The text inside reads: "A 2003 study found, regardless of body size, children who experienced high levels of food restriction were more likely to eat when not hungry compared to those who had low levels of restriction."

A 2003 study found, regardless of body size, children who experienced high levels of food restriction were more likely to eat when not hungry compared to those who had low levels of restriction.

TO HELP YOUR CHILD FOSTER A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD:

DO:

- ◆ **Provide your child with a variety of foods.**
This allows them to be curious around food, get different nutrients, and accept a wider variety.
- ◆ **Let your child eat the amount they want.**
This allows them to practice eating intuitively and gain confidence and autonomy around food.
- ◆ **Model a balanced relationship with food at meal times.**
This teaches your child what balanced eating looks like because children learn by imitating and mirroring others' actions.
- ◆ **Make mealtimes pleasant and predictable.**
This teaches your child that eating is meant to be enjoyable and that they do not have to question when they will eat next, which can cause feelings of angst and food insecurity.
- ◆ **Encourage your child to eat for both taste and satisfaction, rather than just fullness.**
Food is meant to be enjoyed and bring happiness. By teaching your child this at a young age, they will harbor this idea with them through adulthood.
- ◆ **Incorporate sweets into mealtimes and snacks.**
This will help teach your child that all foods can be part of a balanced diet as opposed to having more power over "healthy" foods which may cause them to seek out these foods in excess.

DONT:

- ◆ **Label foods as "good/healthy" or "bad/unhealthy."**
This attaches moral virtue to food, villainizes foods, and can lead to an increased desire to eat these foods in excess and in the absence of hunger for emotional reasons.
- ◆ **Comment on how much your child is eating.**
This may invalidate their innate ability to eat intuitively, make them question their judgment, and erode their ability to stop eating when full or to eat until no longer hungry.
- ◆ **Praise your child for eating with phrases including "great job."**
This can put pressure on them to eat past the point of fullness and erode their ability to eat intuitively.
- ◆ **Pressure your child to eat more or finish their meal.**
This may lead them to disliking the foods that you are offering.
- ◆ **Talk about going on diets in front of your child.**
This teaches them from a young age that they are unable to trust their hunger and need to change their body.
- ◆ **Restrict "unhealthy/bad" foods or offer them as rewards.**
This teaches them that these foods have more power than others and should be coveted which can lead to binge/restrict cycles.
- ◆ **Purchase low-calorie, fat-free or diet foods as a way to control your child's calorie, fat or sugar intake.**
These foods are often less satisfying; offering full-fat or non-diet foods allow kids to feel more satisfied and learn to self-regulate around more calorie-dense foods.

Common unhealthy food talk and examples of restructured talk:

"I am going to eat a salad because it's healthy/low calorie/good/the right choice/will help me lose weight."

↙ "I am going to choose a salad because it sounds tasty and is what I want in the moment."

"I can't eat a donut because I am on a diet/need to lose weight/it's bad."

↙ "I'm going to eat the donut because that's what I really want."

"You have to eat all of the vegetables before dessert."

↙ "If you're not hungry for vegetables right now, we can save the vegetables for later and have some dessert now."

Best option Put the dessert on the table and make it part of the meal.

"I'm so bad for eating this ice cream."

↙ "The ice cream that I ate was delicious and I wanted it."

TO HELP YOUR CHILD FOSTER A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR BODY:

DO

DONT

- ◆ **Emphasize values that have nothing to do with the way that they look including personality, intelligence, kindness, etc.**

This will put focus on the aspects of your child that are truly valuable and important as opposed to making their value equate to their looks.

- ◆ **Encourage your child to participate in physical activities or sports that they enjoy and make them feel good about themselves.**

This will help your child cultivate a healthy relationship with movement and equate movement to enjoyment as opposed to punishment or a way to control their size.

- ◆ **Exemplify respect for all body sizes by promoting body diversity.**

Emphasizing that everyone, regardless of body size, deserves love and respect may help your child feel more secure in their body and not feel the need to change it for your love or respect.

- ◆ **Share positive body messages (i.e all bodies are good bodies, bodies don't define us, we are more than our bodies).**

This takes the pressure off of how your child's body looks and on the person as a whole.

- ◆ **Model healthy movement for enjoyment rather than for weight loss.**

Children learn through imitation. By exemplifying what healthy movement for enjoyment looks like they are more likely to do the same.

- ◆ **Call out people who are fat-shaming others.**

This teaches your child that endorsing fat-phobic behavior is unacceptable.

- ◆ **Talk about weight loss or weight in general in front of your child.**

This may lead to them believing that there is something wrong with their body or they need to lose weight.

- ◆ **Make comments about someone else's body.**

Making a comment, whether believed to be positive or not, can have a negative impact. This can lead to your child comparing their body to the person that you're commenting on. Comments perceived to be as "positive," can be just as harmful as negative comments.

- ◆ **Criticize your own body.**

Children learn from their parents and mirror their actions and words. By criticizing your body in front of them it teaches them from a young age that they should be doing the same.

- ◆ **Comment on your child's body or clothing size.**

This cultivates shame and disappointment in your child. This may make them feel as though they need to fit into a certain clothing size or look a certain way in order to gain your love or respect.

- ◆ **Force your child to play sports or participate in physical activity as a way to control their weight.**

This teaches them from a young age that movement is a form of punishment.

Common unhealthy body talk and examples of restructured talk:

"I look fat in this shirt. I need to lose weight."

↙ "This shirt is no longer fitting my body as it should. I will go buy a new shirt that fits my body rather than shrink myself to fit it."

"I should go to the gym today because I need to lose weight."

↙ "I am choosing to go to the gym today because it makes me feel good/happy/stronger."

OR

"I am going to stay home today because I want to."

Podcast episode on food restriction in children:

<https://thenourishedchild.com/tnc-029-food-restriction-forbidden-food/>