

Helping Children Feel Good About Themselves

Information for Parents and Caregivers

Did you know...

Many children are disappointed with their body shape and size and grow up believing that their appearance isn't good enough. According to the 2015 Centre for Addictions and Mental Health's Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS), 66% of students are attempting to change their weight. These thoughts and behaviours can lead to an unhealthy body image and low self-esteem.

In a society that places a lot of importance on how we look, we need to help children understand that healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

It's what's inside that counts!

What can you do?

Health Canada recommends focusing on the following key areas to help children and youth achieve the best health.

1. Eat healthy
2. Be active
3. Feel good about yourself

As a parent or caregiver you are a powerful role model for your child. Your child looks to you as a model for their own behaviour. Setting a good example will encourage your child to develop healthy attitudes and behaviours and reinforce healthy lifestyle choices.



Helping children to eat healthy

Families and caregivers play a major role in creating a positive eating environment. Taking time to eat meals together makes eating more enjoyable and helps children develop a healthy attitude toward food. Teaching children healthy eating habits regardless of their shape and size will promote healthy growth and development and a body size and shape that is right for them.

Remember that as a parent you are responsible for the food that is provided and your child is responsible for the amount of food eaten. Diets are not recommended for children as their bodies and brains are still developing. Helpful tips:

- Enjoy a wide variety of foods; use "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. Healthy eating means enjoying all kinds of food in moderation without feeling guilty.
- Prepare meals that include a variety of foods from each of the four food groups.
- Involving children in meal planning and preparation helps teach skills necessary to make healthy choices.
- Enjoy regular structured meals and snack times. Aim to eat together as a family at least three times a week.

- When packing school lunches aim to have three out of the four food groups to have a balanced meal.
- Encourage your child to listen to their body; eat when they are hungry, stop when they are full.

Helping children to be active

To remain healthy, children need to be active every day. Children need at least 60 minutes per day of moderate (e.g., walking) to vigorous activity (running, climbing, swimming) as recommended by the Canadian 24 Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth. Provide opportunities for your child to be active. Being active with your child in fun ways will help your child be more active and healthy. Helpful tips:

- Look for non-competitive programs that teach the basics and focus on participation over skill. Helping children learn basic movement can increase their confidence and self-esteem.
- Help your child enjoy a variety of activities besides organized sport. Unstructured play such as playing outside promotes creativity, social skills, coordination, balance, muscle development and strength.
- Promote activities that can be done as a family and can be enjoyed lifelong such as walking, cycling, swimming, hiking and playing catch.
- Be an active role model. Walk whenever you can – use the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Limit screen time to no more than two hours a day (e.g., cell phone, tablet, playing video games and watching television). Encourage active play instead.

Helping children to feel good about their bodies

Children grow and develop at different rates. Your child may be taller or shorter, lighter or heavier than other children the same age. These differences in growth rates can sometimes make children worry about their own bodies. Boys and girls who are unhappy with their body shape and size may develop unhealthy habits in an effort to achieve a “perfect body” or weight. Parents and caregivers can help children feel good about their bodies and make healthy choices. Helpful tips:

- Help your child understand that:
 - Genetics plays a role in determining body shape and size
 - Healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes.
- Talk about how the media and stereotypes can affect how they feel about their bodies.
- Encourage your child to choose role models based on their internal qualities (athletic ability, kind and artistic) rather than on appearance.
- Be aware of the non-verbal and verbal messages you send (e.g., the comments you make on the appearance of yourself and others).
- Your child’s weight should not be the focus. A child’s weight should be compared to his or her own pattern of growth over a long period of time.
- Encourage healthy eating and physical activity for the entire family. Praise your child for the healthy choices they make.

For more information on physical activity, healthy eating and feeling good about yourself go to:

www.halton.ca/haltonparents

www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

www.eatrightontario.ca

www.csep.ca/en/guidelines

<http://webaps.halton.ca/health/resources/>

Call 311 to speak to a
Public Health Nurse or email
schoolhealth@halton.ca

8:30a.m.-4:30p.m.,
Monday through Friday

