

# **What to do** if your child is being bullied at school for his/her body size?



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## Who needs to read this?

Parents of children who have experienced bullying at school due to their body or weight, or parents who are worried about their kids' weight and eating habits.

### Notes

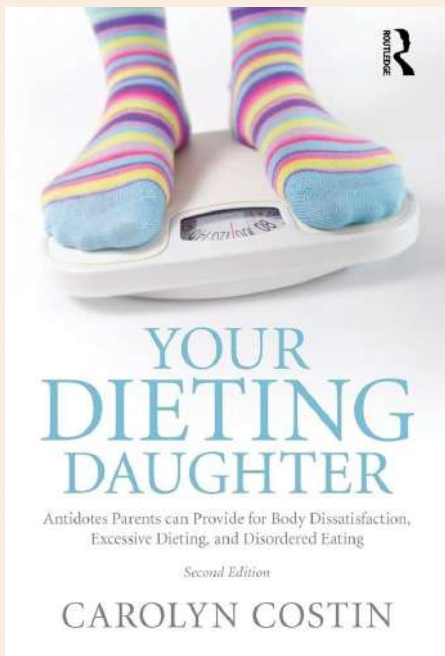
*Boys and girls can be discriminated against based on their size. In many of these notes, we use “she” and “her” for the child, but the advice applies to any gender.*

*Most of the advice in this document is useful for parents whose child might be considered overweight.*



If your child has experienced bullying due to their body or weight, remember to help them focus on **health** rather than **weight**.

When your kid is bullied for their body size, you have the opportunity to be an **advocate for their health and worth**, independently of their appearance.



**Book:**

*Your Dieting Daughter*

**Notes from Chapter 1:**

My daughter wants/  
needs to diet.

**Author:**

Carolyn Costin, M.A.,  
M.Ed., MFT.

If you are worried about your child being overweight, you have to be careful not to unwittingly become the first source of discrimination against her weight, giving the message that, because of the size of her body, she is unacceptable.

**Context**

In the US, between 13% and 41% of girls ages 8–10 reported engaging in some form of dieting behavior, such as exercising or using diet foods to lose weight.<sup>1</sup>

A 2006 study by researcher Dianne Neumark-Sztainer found that dieting and weight-control behaviors, especially unhealthy ones, were actually associated with weight gain.<sup>2</sup>

Dieting is strongly predictive of disordered eating behaviors five years later.<sup>3</sup>

One study tracking eating disorders admissions to a hospital showed that from 1999 to 2009, “hospitalizations for children under age 12 increased 72 percent.”<sup>4</sup>

## Defintion of Dieting

Severely restricting calories, eliminating whole categories of food, skipping meals or snacks, taking diet pills or other weight-loss supplements, and doing anything else to lose weight that does not give you the fuel and nutrients you need and that you would not do or be able to do for the rest of your life.

Diets don't tend to work (long term) and there is plenty of research that proves that, as you can verify in all references in this document. Dieting is actually dangerous because you can hurt your metabolism and also gain more weight afterwards, which makes losing weight harder and harder due to slow metabolism.





# What to do when your kid comes home crying and tells you other kids are making fun of her because she is fat?

*Response examples and analysis (assuming child is overweight):*

## **X- Reassure her that she is not overweight and to ignore the other kids.**

This is not a bad response if your daughter is not overweight but if she is, then she just won't believe you. In any case, don't lie to your daughter. Don't tell her to ignore her friends because at that age, her friends are her world, so you are asking her to ignore her world.

## **X- Tell her that you will help her go on a diet to lose weight**

The idea of helping your child lose weight with a diet might sound good at first but it is full of dangerous implications. It is very likely that dieting won't work long term and will cause more harm than good.

There is little support that dieting leads to lasting weight loss in the long term or that it provides health benefits.<sup>5</sup>

Research repeatedly shows that diets are not the answer.<sup>6</sup> Dieting slows down metabolism<sup>7</sup> and changes

other hormones making it hard to maintain weight loss and when the weight is gained back, which it usually is, it's much harder to lose weight again.<sup>8</sup>

In one study dieters are at least two to three times more at risk of being overweight at a later date as non-dieters.<sup>9</sup>

Dieting sets up people to binge eat, gain more weight than even before the diet, and in susceptible individuals can lead to an eating disorder.<sup>10</sup>

Also, if you agree to help her lose weight you are contributing to the belief that her looks are unacceptable or unattractive. Instead, explore the idea that **the change needs to be around healthy habits, not weight control.**

Discuss any behaviors that she might be doing that contribute to her weight, such as emotional eating or not paying attention to her hunger and fullness signals.



Rather than putting her on a diet, help her learn to listen to her body and make healthier choices but avoid using the scale.

## The focus should be on **health**, not on losing weight.

If the focus is on weight, then you will start making differences between her eating and the rest of the family. If the focus is on health, then the whole family will benefit. Do not ask your child to eat differently than the rest of the family. This could lead to resentment towards you and/or hiding to eat what is forbidden.

Always remember that the overall idea is to focus on how the body works, how to take care of her health, and not on how much she weighs.

### ***X- Tell her that people come in all shapes and sizes, and it's what it's on the inside that matters.***

This is a really good answer. Make sure that you and the whole family consistently reinforce that people come in all shapes and sizes and that not everyone can fit

into the current standard ideal. Messages that focus on internal versus external qualities should be repeated and demonstrated over and over, however this is not enough if the child is constantly bullied at school. If the kid is being teased for being overweight then it's important to ask how she feels, what she can say back to them, and what else she would like to do. Work together on building her self and body esteem.

### ***X- Get her professional help from a dietician or a therapist.***

This is helpful if you notice there is indeed a problem e.g. she is emotionally affected by her weight and appearance, she is engaging in restrictive behaviors, hiding to eat, taking diet pills, throwing away her food, etc.

### **Precautions**

Tell your child that the reason you are taking her to see a specialist is because you would like her to achieve her goals in a healthy way.

Make sure the specialists that you hire are specialists in nutrition, eating disorders or weight control, AND that they take a non-diet approach

and/or are familiar with the concept of Health at Every Size.<sup>11</sup>

You have to make sure that the specialist treating your child focuses on health rather than appearance or a number on the scale. The professional who is working with the child should also involve the whole family, age appropriately.

If possible, make sure that the professionals have experience with eating disorder patients. These professionals will be able to assess if your kid has an eating disorder or not, and if he/she doesn't, then they can help you come up with a plan to prevent the development of an ED.



**Parental attitudes and expectations are critical** in influencing young kids about their bodies and dieting.

A mother (or father) can influence her kids' body image and decision to lose weight by displaying her own issues with her body, food, weight and dieting. Loving, feeding and nurturing one's own body are good ways for a parent to have a positive influence.

Mothers (or fathers) who make decisions based on the number on the scale and/or practice unhealthy dieting or weight-loss habits can easily pass on these habits to their kids.

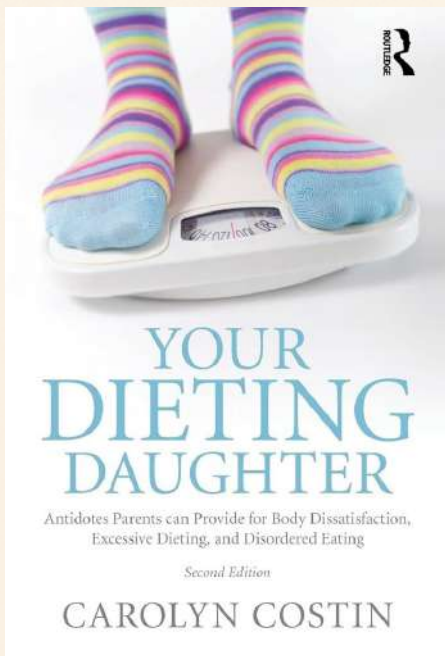
A father who focuses more on his daughter's (and all female's) external qualities rather than internal qualities gives her the message about which ones are important.



What to do if your child is being bullied at school for his/her body size?

Diets tend to **fail** in the long term and can be dangerous in many ways. Dieting can trigger our bodies' survival mechanism to prevent weight loss, and research shows that dieters are more likely to regain the weight and not be able to lose it again.

This chapter introduces a better way to manage our desire to be healthy while healing our relationship with food: **conscious eating**.



**Book:**

*Your Dieting Daughter*

**Notes from Chapter 11:**

So...you want to go on a diet?

**Author:**

Carolyn Costin, M.A,  
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**Context**

Findings show that dieting and unhealthy weight-control behaviors among adolescents predict significant weight gain over time.<sup>12</sup>

In a five-year study, adolescents who reported dieting were nearly twice as likely to become overweight by the end of the study. Those who engaged in unhealthy behaviors, such as skipping meals or using diet pills, were three times more likely to be overweight.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, adolescents who diet are 7-8 times more likely to develop an eating disorder compared with those who do not.<sup>14</sup>

Between 75% and 95% of people who lose weight through dieting eventually regain it.

The evidence that **diets are ineffective** in the long term is clear and abundant.<sup>15</sup>



# Why don't diets work in the long term?

People who “fail” at a diet often believe they are the problem, when in reality it is the concept of dieting itself that fails. Our bodies are biologically designed to resist weight loss whenever they sense any form of starvation.

One particularly alarming study of adolescents found that those who reported dieting had a 324% greater risk of developing obesity compared to non-dieters<sup>16</sup>

(the dieters did not start out at a higher weight).

“Your body is designed to fight against weight loss because starvation was a real threat to our ancestors. When you go on a diet your body doesn’t understand that you are trying to lose weight, and so it protects you. When you lose weight, both your resting and non-resting metabolism decrease in an attempt to conserve whatever calories you do eat. In your body’s

attempt to help you, a variety of hormone changes occur, which make it harder and harder to lose weight and easier to gain it back. These changes also affect your brain, creating an increased obsession with food, and increased appetite<sup>17</sup> and greater emotional response to food, often leading to binging. And all these metabolic, hormonal, and other changes don’t just return to normal after you stop dieting. Your body actually continues to protect itself by conserving calories and storing fat even after you stop dieting, thus gearing your body up to guard against weight loss. This is clearly a set up for any diet to fail, inevitably creating feelings of frustration, and in some cases, desperation.” (pp. 182–183)



# Dieting **myths**

## **DIET MYTH #1**

***Really strict diets and detox diets jump-start weight loss.***

Strict/Detox diets are worse than regular diets because they can cause the body to go into starvation mode and slow down metabolism even more than regular dieting. These diets often result in losing too much lean muscle mass, and since the diets cannot be maintained, the weight is gained back.

## **DIET MYTH #2**

***There are products on the market that have been proven to be successful in long-term weight-loss.***

Nope! Fat blockers, diet pills, metabolism boosters, fat burners, and similar products work for a period of time, but none has been proven to lead to successful long-term weight loss results. Even worse, some of these products can have dangerous side effects and negatively affect your heart.

## **DIET MYTH #3**

***You have to earn food through exercise.***

You need food (fuel) just to stay alive and for your body to work properly, allowing your hair to grow and your organs to function, for example. You will need even more food if you choose to use it to do more with your body, such as walking, running, and exercising.

## **DIET MYTH #4**

***Eating after dinner makes you gain weight more easily.***

It's true that your metabolism is more active during the day but weight gain or weight loss has to do more with how much you eat and less with when you eat.

## **DIET MYTH #5**

***Avoid carbohydrates if you want to lose weight.***

Eating fewer carbohydrates may make you lose weight, but usually this is because you end up eating fewer calories and lose water weight.

Restricting carbs causes the body to shed water weight, because carbohydrates are stored in the body with water. Dehydration is not real weight loss and any lost water will be regained later, even if you gain it through vegetables. Carbohydrates are necessary to fuel bodily functions including burning fat. Of course, if you frequently overeat carbohydrates, especially those with processed fat and sugar, this might contribute to weight problems. It can be helpful to educate yourself on types of carbohydrates, eating balanced meals, and listening to your hunger and fullness cues.

## **DIET MYTH #6**

***Certain foods are fattening.***

There is no such thing as a single "fattening" food. Eating one cupcake will not make you gain weight. While some foods are more nutrient dense than others, weight is determined by overall eating patterns, not by individual foods. What really matters are habits. For example, eating





a dozen cupcakes every day would likely lead to weight gain unless you reduced intake elsewhere, because of the overall calorie balance. The cupcake itself is not the problem; the eating pattern is. Naturally whole foods tend to be more nutrient rich and are good to make the bulk of your diet, but there is also room for processed or so called “unhealthy” foods within a balanced approach. In terms of weight alone, your body does not distinguish between 300 calories from a cupcake and 300 calories from a turkey sandwich. It

only tracks energy in versus energy out.

#### **DIET MYTH #7** ***Fat makes you fat.***

As with the previous myth, what leads to weight gain is an overall unhealthy habit, not a single food. Your body needs fat to maintain healthy hormone levels, hair, nails, and skin. Eating fat also helps you feel full and satisfied for longer. While some types of fat are healthier than others and should be prioritized in a balanced diet, it is inaccurate

to label all fats as “fattening.” Weight gain is caused by consuming more calories than you use, regardless of where those calories come from.

Restriction leads to slowed metabolism, hair loss, muscle deterioration, bone loss, binge eating, and various other undesired consequences. Abusing laxatives ultimately ruins your bowel function and causes kidney damages.

# If dieting is not the answer... then what do I do to **heal my relationship with food** and care for my health?

(For parents and their children)

These guidelines are mostly related to food, however, you do need to find a form of movement and exercise that you enjoy. It's important that you take care of your body in order to do any exercise. You can't demand your body to exercise if you haven't fueled it appropriately to perform basic tasks such as making your organs work or your heart pump blood throughout your body.

## **Regarding food and eating.**

There is a concept out there called "intuitive eating." Intuitive eating is a great ultimate goal. However, if you have been dieting for many years or if you have lost connection with your hunger and fullness signals, you might need to start with a meal plan to help you test different foods and quantities, and see how you feel.

We are well aware that different foods contain different nutrients. Some foods are more nutrient-dense than others, and some

foods, such as certain kinds of fats, are better for your health than others, but **as far as your weight is concerned, a calorie is a calorie.** Weight is determined by calories consumed versus calories burned. No food is bad or should be forbidden.

**Your body does not gain weight from 300 calories of yogurt and fruit any more or less than it does from 300 calories of pasta and meatballs.**

This is a very hard belief to break down, so you might need to read that last sentence over and over.

## **Introducing conscious eating**

With "conscious" eating we mean using knowledge and awareness.

When you practice conscious eating you place an emphasis on awareness of your body signals, incorporate general education about nutrition, take into account any relevant health information, and eat the foods you truly enjoy. Since it takes knowledge and awareness to become a conscious eater we provide some guidelines:

The following guidelines will work well for ANYONE who wants to heal his/her relationship with food. These guidelines will help you have a better relationship with food while also taking care of your body in a sustainable way.



# The Ten Conscious Eating Guidelines

- 1 Be conscious of your hunger. Eat when moderately hungry. Don't wait until you are famished.
- 2 Eat regularly. Don't skip meals, and if possible, don't go over four hours without eating.
- 3 Allow yourself to eat all foods (unless you are allergic or have a serious health issue).
- 4 Eat what you want, while also being conscious of how foods make you feel, what you have already eaten, and relevant health issues (for example, candy may not be a good conscious choice if you have diabetes or if you haven't eaten any protein all day).
- 5 There are no good or bad foods when it comes to weight. All calories are equivalent when it comes to weight (that is, a calorie is a calorie).
- 6 For meals, eat a balance of protein, fat, and carbohydrates. Your body needs ALL of these to function properly and efficiently. Deprivation of foods or nutrients leads to physical and psychological problems and can actually trigger eating disorder behaviors.
- 7 Stay conscious of your fullness and your satisfaction. You can eat a lot and not be satisfied. Texture and taste of food is important for satisfaction and eating enough is important so your body registers the experience of being comfortably full. The goal is to feel full and satisfied, but not physically uncomfortable in any way.
- 8 If you do overeat (which is normal to do sometimes), reassure yourself that your body can handle the excess food if you simply get back on track. It is OK to wait until you are hungry before eating again, but don't wait too long.
- 9 Enjoy food and the pleasure of eating. At times, enhance your dining experience by lighting candles, using nice dishes, or setting flowers on the table.
- 10 Make conscious choices to avoid foods that make you physically feel bad after eating them.

## Putting the new guidelines **into practice**

The **conscious** part is the core and will make all the other parts possible to follow.

The goal of conscious eating is to be all these things on a daily basis:

**Conscious enough** to stay connected to your bodily sensations of hunger and fullness.

**Conscious enough** to be aware of other people and the conversation around you. Conscious enough of health and nutrition.

**Conscious enough** to be aware of health and nutrition information to make appropriate choices without depriving yourself.



The great thing about conscious eating is that your body is quite adept at letting you know **when, how much, and what you need to eat** without risk of any physical or mental harm.



## Endnotes

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Notes from Coaching program [Carolyn Costin Institute](#)



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