

Weighty Matters for Parents

By Brette McWhorter Sember

As a plus-size mom, you want the world for your child. You want her to grow up to be happy and healthy. And you will love your child no matter what size he is. However, you probably are hoping that your child can avoid some of the struggles you have had – after all, we always want our children to have better lives than we did. Even if you love your body the way it is, you still would not want him or her to have to struggle with body image at all.

As a parent though, you're faced with a terrible quandary. You want your child's life to be easy. And as a plus-size mom, you know that being plus-size is something that can make your life harder. Whether it is medical issues, yo-yo dieting, dissatisfaction with how you look, self-image problems, or discrimination, you know from firsthand experience that in our society it is simply easier to be thinner. You don't want your child to have to relive the bumps in the road that you have lived. In short, you know it would be simpler if you could help your child control his or her weight. And it's definitely going to be simpler for him or her if healthy eating is a lifetime habit.

But on the other hand, you want your child to have great self-esteem and grow up loving herself no matter what size she wears. And it may seem it is almost impossible to achieve that if you have to become the food police in your house and be the one who focuses on controlling your child's weight.

You also don't want to be a hypocrite. There's just no way that you, as a beautiful curvy mom, can tell your child, "No candy for you" or "You can't have any of mommy's dessert".

The problem is how do you reconcile all of this? Do you restrict certain foods, all the while telling your child how beautiful he is and hope that will lead to some kind of balance? Do you not place any restrictions on food in the hope of avoiding any food fixations or unhealthy notions?

There are several ways you can work to help your child grow up at a healthy weight (*not* Kate Moss thin) while still helping her have a healthy body image.

Be positive about your own body. Moms who talk about how they hate their bodies have kids who think that you should hate their own bodies. Model body acceptance and your child will learn it. Constant negative talk about size and weight drills into your kids' heads that they shouldn't be happy with their own bodies – no matter what size they are.

Be honest about your situation. If you're trying to lose weight or if you aren't happy with your current weight, it's ok to be open about that in front of your family. This is a struggle you are dealing with and if you are honest about it, it will help your children understand what you are coping with. There is a difference between being honest and being negative though, so this is a fine line to walk.

Talk about food choices. Make food and eating a topic of conversation in your house. Talk about healthy foods and healthy portions from very young ages. Let your child know what the choices are that must be made with regard to food. This does not mean you must suddenly

become a sprouts and beans kind of family. You're an adult and can make your own choices about food, but your job as a parent is to educate your child about the facts.

Don't emotionalize food. For many women, food is fraught with emotion. We use food to reward ourselves or to comfort ourselves. Try to avoid doing this with your children. It is fine to have special treats, but it is not fine to use food as a regular reward or enticement.

Be yourself. It is tempting to turn over a new leaf and be the standard bearer for healthy eating in your family. If you can do that, terrific. If you have tried and still struggle with your own eating habits, stop beating yourself up. Becoming a closet eater is not going to help anyone – you or your child. All that does is teach your children that eating is synonymous with shame. Eat what you want and if your child questions it, talk about it. Explain that you're making your own choices and that not even grown ups make the right choices all the time.

Provide options. Make sure your house has a wide variety of foods available for family members to choose from. However, as a parent, it's your prerogative to ban certain foods. For example, many parents do not allow young children to drink soda and other parents do not buy potato chips or sugary cereal. Make the choices you think are appropriate for your child, but make sure that you do offer food options, so your child can learn to make these kinds of decisions.

Have dinner. Having dinner together, as a family, on most nights, benefits everyone. First it allows you, or whoever is cooking, to provide a satisfying and balanced meal. Kids see adults eating vegetables and are motivated to try them. Dinners also give you a chance to connect with

your kids and catch up on their day. People also tend to eat healthier portions when they are dining with others, rather than sitting alone in front of a television.

Talk about weight issues. Talk to your kids about how unhealthy it is to see the bones on those Hollywood starlets. Make a case for lovely women with curves. Let your kids know growing up that a person is beautiful because of who they are inside, not whether they can fit into a size 0 dress. Talk about the way fast food companies are making our country fat and how our lifestyle doesn't make exercise a priority. Talk about why there are no decent clothes for women who are average size or above (average is a size 12 or 14 these days). Have an open line of dialogue in your home about these issues. Talk about the problems and the possible solutions.

Brette McWhorter Sember is co-author of **Your Plus-Size Pregnancy: The Ultimate Guide for the Full-Figured Expectant Mom** (Barricade Books) and the owner of www.YourPlusSizePregnancy.com.