

Talking with Families about Healthy Weight

Janice Fletcher, EdD and Laurel Branen, PhD, RD, LD

Focus on the *partnership* you have with families. Talk often about good health and what you do in your program to help children have a pleasant, healthy childhood.

Recognize your biases about weight. Deal with those biases, so you can feel comfortable as you talk with families about their children's weight.

Know that healthy weight requires intake of appropriate calories AND active movement.

Intake of Appropriate Calories

1. Teach families how to recognize their children's eating behaviors. Help them know what to look for when a child is eating according to feelings of hunger and fullness.
2. Ask about a family's dreams for their child's health. Listen to their dreams for short term health. Then, listen to their dreams for their child's long term health.
3. Talk with families about the closeness of families and children in early childhood. Discuss the child's most supportive family member. Talk about how that supportive adult can allow a child to listen to internal cues of hunger and fullness.
4. Explain to families *why* you set out specific foods and utensils. Explain what you *expect* the children to do with the food or utensil. Explain how your center offers strategies for helping children stay in touch with their feelings of hunger and fullness.
5. Take notes about what happens with children's eating and mealtime skills in your program. Include the child's preferences. Observe attempts at trying new foods or serving skills. Show progress over time. Share what you learn with families often. Document eating skills in a child's portfolio. Eating skills include things as judging amounts to serve themselves, recognizing hunger and fullness cues, pouring from pitchers, choosing how much to put in their mouths so they can chew and swallow comfortably and without choking, using utensils, choosing what to eat, trying unfamiliar foods and eating a variety of foods.
6. Ask families to share their child's progress in eating skills at home with you.

Active Play and Physical Activity

1. Discuss the significant impact of physical activity on healthy weight.
2. Explain to families how you *intentionally* prepare active play opportunities.
3. Tell families *why* you set out specific activities and equipment for active movement.
4. Explain what you *expect* children will do physically in active play, i.e. jumping, climbing, hopping, running, galloping, throwing and catching, or riding wheel toys.
5. Take notes to tell what a child actually did with the equipment or during activities.
6. Document children's active play. Show progress over time. Share with families often. Document children's active play skills in annual portfolios.
7. Ask families to share their child's active play experiences at home with you.