


CONNECT

Exploring Conversations About Child Weight Management For Professionals

We hope this leaflet will help you to...



**Understand why
conversations about
child weight
management can
feel challenging**

**Feel confident
exploring
weight and
health
behaviour with
families**



Why consider conversations around weight management in children?

Number of individuals experiencing overweightness have been on the rise in recent decades, and recent reports suggest that around 27% of under 18s experience overweightness (Child Measurement Programme, 2021). Elevated BMI in childhood is associated with higher BMI in adulthood, as well as health comorbidities and psychosocial difficulties. **Early intervention can help promote beneficial lifestyle behaviours** before less healthy habits become more deeply established.



Research suggests that conversations with parents that they perceive as unhelpful can lead to **disruption in the professional relationship, healthcare avoidance, and worsened health outcomes**.

Simple tweaks in approach can improve intervention without increased time or resource needs.

Why can these conversations be a challenge?

Conversations around weight can be sensitive because of **societal stigma** around weight. It can feel even more challenging due to **complex social and environmental factors that can affect weight management for families**, including things like mental health, cost of living and social support.



What can make conversations difficult for professionals?

Research shows that **professionals may feel worried about saying the wrong thing or receiving a negative reaction from broaching the topic**. However, if this conversation is **handled compassionately it can actually decrease feelings of shame** for parents.

As professionals, we exist within the same weight-biased society as patients, and may have **subconscious implicit bias** which service users may pick up on. **Open and compassionate conversations around the complexity of weight** can help highlight any biases we may hold, and help us all reflect on our practice.



What can make conversations difficult for parents?

Studies show parents will often **feel shame or blame** due to their children's weight and may put up defences as a result. They may also feel **scared or hopeless** at the thought of making lifestyle changes and playing down the issue may help alleviate this discomfort for some. **Being explicit about supporting not judging** can help open up the conversation and reduce parental anxiety.





Who should be involved in these conversations?

Weight management is a key part of healthcare, and is appropriate to address within primary care, **by any health professional.**

Conversations should **involve the parents**, as they will be drivers in lifestyle change, and if appropriate, the young person. **This will of course depend on factors like age and temperament – ask the parent if they feel the young person will benefit from being involved.** Similarly, **extended family members with influence over household eating/activity habits maybe helpful to get involved.**



When should we be having these conversations?

Weight concerns should be raised only **after initial health concerns have been addressed in the appointment.**

Generally, weight may be a topic to discuss as soon as an elevated BMI centile (85th–91st, depending on previous growth chart entries) is identified. **A follow-up appointment might be beneficial to ensure there is enough time to explore changes and support, and parents can choose if child is present.**

How should these conversations be approached?

This is the key part – **be explicit in acknowledging that these conversations can be difficult, but that they are about support rather than judgment.** Be prepared for a variety of reactions, and **validate** these e.g. “it is common to feel...” but reinforce that **weight is complex and not shameful.** It might be the first time this has been raised and could feel surprising for parents.

Ask **open-questions and use active listening** to hear **parent’s perspectives** on the situation, and what they might be struggling with. **Consider the family context** before making any assumptions.

What should we be saying in these conversations?

Firstly ensure your knowledge around paediatric diet and exercise is up to date. Address any myths or misunderstandings you or the parent may hold. Check where they are in terms of knowledge and motivation to change.

Then **consider potential barriers to lifestyle changes**, and **explore collaboratively** with parents short-term **achievable SMART goals.** These should be based around **health or behaviour**, such as eating more fruit and vegetables, reducing more processed foods, or increasing activity, **not weight or size.**





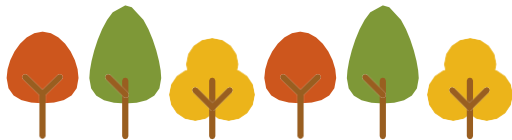
Phrases that may be helpful when starting the conversation include...

We've measured [child's] height and weight today [show on growth chart if possible]. Is there anything you want to talk to me about with regards to [child's] growth?

There's lots of reasons why someone might experience a high BMI. Do you have any thoughts about what support you might find helpful?

Is there anything about this you are finding tricky or more difficult at the moment?

What support would you like with this?





For More Information...

HealthyWey Training Modules



National Child Measurement Programme Conversation Framework:



The 5As



Let's Talk About Weight



Weight Related Conversations Guides



Weight Stigma Resource Hub



Contact Us



Tel: 0300 3034906

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