



**Thrive
Together**

OAC'S Youth and Families Program

ANTI-BULLYING TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS

Addressing Weight-Based Bullying

A program brought to you by



What is Weight-based Bullying?

Weight-based bullying includes teasing, exclusion, name-calling or harassment directed at a child because of their body size or weight. It can happen in person, online, at school or even within social or family settings.

This type of bullying is common and harmful. It can affect a child's emotional well-being, self-esteem, school performance and long-term health. Weight-based bullying is one of the most common forms of bullying reported by youth.

Signs Your Child May Be Experiencing Bullying:

- Avoiding school or activities they once enjoyed
- Changes in mood, anxiety or withdrawal
- Unexplained physical complaints such as headaches or stomachaches
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Negative self-talk about their body or worth
- Sudden drop in academic performance

Why It Matters

Weight-based bullying is not just teasing. It can lead to depression and anxiety, social isolation, disordered eating behaviors, lower self-confidence and avoidance of physical activity or healthcare.



What You Can Do



1. Start the Conversation

Create a safe space for your child to talk. Ask open-ended questions like "How are things going at school?" or "Who do you usually sit with at lunch?" Listen without interrupting or minimizing. Validate their feelings by saying, "That must be hard" and "Thank you for telling me. I'm really glad you came to me."



2. Reinforce Their Worth

Help your child understand that their value is not defined by their body. Focus on strengths, interests and character. Avoid negative body talk about yourself or others at home.



3. Teach Response Strategies

Give your child tools they can use in the moment. Practice simple responses such as "that's not okay" or "stop." Practice together at home so your child feels more confident using these responses. Encourage them to walk away, seek help and identify trusted adults like a teacher, coach or school counselor.



4. Check Your School's Policy

Not all anti-bullying policies specifically include weight. Review your school or district's policy to see if weight or body size is explicitly listed. If it is not, advocacy can help create change. OAC offers template letters to support you in speaking up.



5. Document and Report

If bullying is happening at school, keep a record of incidents including dates, details and screenshots if online. When you're ready, reach out to teachers, counselors or school administrators and reference the school's policy when sharing your concerns.



6. Partner with the School

Approach the school as a partner, not an adversary. Request a meeting to create a plan for your child's safety and follow up regularly to ensure action is being taken.



7. Support Emotional Well-being

Encourage activities that build confidence and connection. Consider counseling if your child is struggling and remind them they are not alone.

What to Avoid:

- Speaking negatively about your own body or other people's bodies
- Telling your child to ignore it or toughen up
- Blaming their body or suggesting weight change as a solution
- Confronting other children directly without school involvement



TAKE ACTION: Advocate for Your Child and Others

If your school's policy does not include weight-based bullying, you can help change that. Use the Obesity Action Coalition templates to speak up and request that weight and body size be added to your school's anti-bullying policy.

You can submit a parent letter and encourage your child, if appropriate, to share their voice using the student letter. Sharing both perspectives can help school leaders better understand the impact and the need for change.

Share your concerns with school leadership, your PTA or district officials and encourage consistent, clear protections for all students.

Access the templates here:

Parent Letter: Add Weight-Based Bullying Protections

Student Letter: Make Our School Safe for Everyone

Small actions can lead to meaningful change for your child and others in your community.

FIND SUPPORT:

Thrive Together for Families

Thrive Together is a program from the Obesity Action Coalition that supports youth and families through education, connection and empowerment. It offers tools and resources to help children and teens build confidence, navigate challenges like weight-based bullying and feel supported in a safe and inclusive community.



Explore Thrive Together here:
ObesityAction.org/thrivetogether

Helpful Reminders

- ✓ Bullying is never your child's fault.
- ✓ Bodies come in many shapes and sizes and all deserve respect.
- ✓ Your support can be one of the most powerful protective factors.



When to Seek Additional Help

Consider professional support if your child shows signs of persistent sadness or anxiety, changes in eating behaviors, avoidance of school or social situations or thoughts of self-harm.

Taking Care of Yourself Matters Too

If you are struggling with your own body image or weight, consider reaching out for support. Taking care of yourself is an important part of supporting your child. Kids learn not just from what we say, but from how we treat ourselves.



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You Are Not Alone

Many families face this issue. Support, education and advocacy can help create safer, more respectful environments for all children. Creating change starts with conversations like this and your voice matters.