

Tell Me

What I Already Know...



How to Talk to a Loved One or Friend about their Obesity

By Gary J. Viscio, Esq.

When I decided to have gastric bypass surgery more than three years ago, the decision was all mine. Sure, I saw Al Roker and Carnie Wilson on television, but the ultimate decision was in my hands.

Prior to the surgery, I really did believe that it would be taking the easy way out. Having had the surgery, I know that is further from the truth. I also know that obesity, namely my obesity, was something that I rarely liked to talk about, let alone listen to the advice from others.

Think about it. We, the obese, probably know more about diets and exercise than those of you who are “in shape.” We’ve been on all the diets, purchased the exercise machines, gym memberships and diet pills. We’ve tried points, scales, fruit and hypnosis. We also know that losing weight is the most important, and probably the most difficult thing we can try in our lives.

Losing weight and leaving the obesity behind has been proven without doubt to improve or eliminate comorbidities that exist as a result of obesity. Diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, even depression can be significantly effected by weight-loss.

The question is; however, how to approach a close friend or loved one to discuss their health and their obesity. The answer – very carefully.

First, always keep in mind everything that I said previously. You are now attempting to tell us, your loved ones, something that we already know. Our life will significantly improve if we lose weight. Second, you’re about to discuss a very personal and private issue. And, finally, losing weight is probably the hardest thing we’ve ever tried to do in our lives and it is the source of tremendous frustration.

Evaluate your relationship with the person you are about to talk with.

- Have you had such personal conversations before?
- If so, what was your loved one’s reaction?
- Can you be sure that you’re not going to come off as condescending or a know it all?

The table to the right lists five suggestions to help you approach your loved one/friend.

Talking to a Non-relative

Let’s say you’re planning on speaking with a friend. Perhaps someone with whom you have a very good relationship, but not one as close as you would with a family member. Remember, do your homework before you speak with your friend. A wealth of information can be found easily on the Internet, in your library or even at your own doctor’s office.

Five Suggestions When Talking to a Loved One/Friend about Their Obesity

- 1. Know the Boundaries**

Only you know how far you can delve into someone's personal life. Be extra sensitive so that you can detect even the slightest feeling of your loved one being uncomfortable and stop the conversation.
- 2. Approach Them in a Truthful and Honest Way**

As I said, we know losing weight is good for us, it's just the past failures and frustration that gets in our way. Let them know how much you care about them. Emphasize that this discussion has nothing to do with how they look. Remind them that they are living for you as well as themselves, and that you want them around as long as possible.
- 3. Provide Information...Not Diet Suggestions**

Use the Internet or your library to research the benefits of weight-loss and provide your loved one with the studies to back up your advice.
- 4. Be Supportive**

If you're going to go this far, then you should be prepared to go all the way. Don't stop at "I'm here for you," or, "if you need anything call me." Go further. Attend those weight-loss meetings with them. Put yourself on the same nutrition and exercise program that they may go on.
- 5. Never Suggest a Diet, or Even Surgery**

Look into different options with them after you've broached the subject. If you suggest something and it doesn't work, you most likely have set yourself up to be blamed for any failure. Let us make our own decisions, while providing a helping hand along the way.

Before you approach your friend, imagine the situation if it were reversed. Would you appreciate a friend's advice or would you find it intrusive or uncomfortable? Treat your friend as you would want to be treated and approach them in that way. Let them know that you are concerned and not judging them. Assure them that you will be as helpful as possible. Even if you cannot attend support meetings with them, an open ear is always appreciated. Trust me, we all can use as much support as possible, even if it is a telephone call.

Above all, remember that only your loved one or friend can make the final decision. No diet, exercise routine, surgery or program is going to help if we don't choose to help ourselves. And, that's your goal... to get us to help ourselves. With your help, success is a real possibility.

About the Author:

Gary J. Viscio, Esq. is an attorney who specializes in appeals for denials of obesity surgery, reimbursement and coverage, as well as obesity discrimination. In July 2003, he underwent weight-loss surgery, and to date has lost more than 160 pounds. He is a member of the Obesity Action Coalition Advisory Board, Obesity Help Advisory Panel and the Board of Directors of the National Spinal Cord Injury Association. He has handled insurance litigation matters for nearly 15 years.





ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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