

## HEALTHY BODIES, HEALTHY MINDS

# A Tool for Parenting Children



Children hear and see many messages on health, body shape and size. Negative messages that focus on weight can harm children's self-esteem, and lead to poor body image and unhealthy behaviours, like disordered eating.

Parents can play an active role in helping their child have a healthy body and healthy mind by taking the focus off weight. We can achieve this by accepting ourselves and others as we are, role modeling healthy behaviours, and providing healthy eating and

physical activity opportunities for overall health. Think about your beliefs, attitudes and actions around body size, eating and activity. Explore how you feel about yourself, and how this can affect your child's views of themselves and their world.

Below you will find ways to interact with your child that will shift the focus from weight to an overall focus on health and mental well-being. These tips can help children understand that there is much more to health than just weight.

### Active Living

**Being active helps build self-confidence, relieves stress, improves sleep and is a fun social activity.**

- ◆ Focus on having fun and feeling good, rather than burning fat and calories.
- ◆ Teach your child to notice how their bodies feel when they are enjoying being active.
- ◆ Engage your child in all levels of physical activity (e.g., sedentary, light, moderate or vigorous).
- ◆ Explore a variety of different activities so that you find the ones that you and your child enjoys.
- ◆ Help your child be comfortable with their body to learn new skills and abilities such as balancing, swimming, running or jumping.
- ◆ Offer many opportunities for daily physical activity that are fun and rewarding. Avoid taking away physical activity as a punishment.
- ◆ Let your child lead the activity, explore their environment and be creative.



## Balanced & Healthy Eating

**Eating regular and balanced meals and snacks gives your child's body and brain the energy they need to stay focused, be active, and be mentally and physically healthy.**

- ♦ Enjoy and try to provide a variety of tasty and nutritious foods, including: colourful vegetables and fruit, whole grains, lower fat milk and fortified milk alternatives (e.g., soy beverage with added calcium and vitamin D), and lean meat and alternatives.
- ♦ Avoid labelling foods as “good” or “bad” as this can link emotions to food, and can lead to children eating certain foods to be “good” or avoid being “bad”. Instead, use words to describe the taste and texture of food (e.g., crunchy, salty, sweet, tasty, or soft). Refer to foods by their actual name (e.g., carrots, yogurt, bread, potato chips, banana, cookie, or chicken).
- ♦ Listen to your body and be comfortable eating when you are hungry and stopping when you are full. Encourage your child to do the same.
- ♦ Eat balanced and regular meals and snacks, including breakfast.
- ♦ Eat together when possible, away from screens, toys and other distractions.
- ♦ Involve your child in meal planning, grocery shopping, food preparation and clean-up.
- ♦ Advocate for access to nutritious foods and drinks where children play, learn and live.
- ♦ Use non-food items to reward your child and avoid linking rewards to food.



## Mental Well-Being & Stress Management

**Talking about and role modelling mental well-being helps to build your child's life skills and resiliency.**

- ♦ Take care of your body and role model balanced eating, physical activity, sleep and positive ways to cope with challenges in life. Focus on overall health instead of weight, shape or size.
- ♦ Focus on feeling good about your body, talents and abilities. Recognize and encourage the same in your child.
- ♦ Understand that healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Talk about accepting and respecting all bodies. Avoid weight-focused messages such as “you’ve lost weight, you look great”, or “I was bad today I ate cake”.
- ♦ Listen to what your child says about themselves, others and media images. Use these opportunities to talk about their feelings and to address any potentially harmful talk.
- ♦ Encourage your child to compliment others on their talents and accomplishments.
- ♦ Teach your child that feeling stress, anxiety and anger is healthy and normal. Show them how to talk through problems and move forward again. They’ll grow up knowing that challenges can be overcome and disappointment can be resolved.

Every parent needs a helping hand. Let us be yours! For more parenting tips and local information on Triple P Parenting sessions, call 1-800-660-5853 or visit [www.triplep-parenting.ca](http://www.triplep-parenting.ca).