



A Healthy Mindset - A Happy Child

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Raising healthy, secure children is the aim of parents worldwide. With this in mind it can be very upsetting when children become unhappy, and as a result unhealthy. Today's article, the final in the series on childrens' weight issues, will explore the connection between psychological and emotional problems and a child's overall holistic health and wellbeing, specifically their physical health and weight.

Misconceptions About Weight Issues

There are a lot of misconceptions in society about the reasons behind weight gain, specifically that it is purely down to laziness. This assumption often leads to stigma and cruelty to those who are overweight. This cruelty is unacceptable and can be the cause of bullying attitudes to those struggling with their weight.

In our previous article about the [causes of weight problems](#) we referenced the study by epidemiologist Jane Wardle from University College London. Her research found that the risk of obesity is three quarters inherited and much less dependent on one's free will or home environment. A book by Dr. Andrew Jenkins called "Why We Eat Too Much", also states the fact that genetic and epigenetic predisposition to obesity can run in families, as well as in whole nations due to their historical development and dominant food environment. It means that a person with obesity genes needs to make much more effort than those without it to maintain a healthy weight.

When it comes to supporting children who are struggling with their weight, often a parent may think to put them on a diet. However, putting children on [diets](#) and forcing restricted food intake can cause further issues down the line and essentially do more harm than good.



Blaming Willpower Is Problematic

As explored in our previous article, blaming a child's weight issues on a [lack of willpower](#) is incredibly problematic, not to mention shaming and unkind. When looking to support children to become healthier and possibly lose weight, it is not about placing blame or encouraging feelings of guilt. This will ultimately lead to cyclical disordered eating and ongoing issues with food. The child needs the support of their parents, and all of the surrounding adults (teachers, family etc), to take a team approach and accountability to ensure the ongoing health of the youngster.

One of the results of the words 'blame' and 'willpower' is the unhealthy obsession with dieting and overexercising within western societies, specifically in the UK and USA.

Guilt and Eating Disorders

Ensuring a supportive and beneficial approach to children with weight issues is very important because emotional issues are often the root cause of [eating disorders in children](#). Children who are struggling emotionally and mentally tend to be the ones that develop disordered eating patterns, use food as a comfort, gain weight and struggle with self-esteem. Eating disorders are a symptom of an unhappy child that is probably dealing with difficulties.

Anorexia, bulimia and binge-eating disorder are all eating illnesses that affect a child's physical, mental and emotional health. In our previous [article](#) we explored the possible causes of these disorders from harmful beauty standards, genetic issues, peer pressure, life transitions and limitations/dieting.

The UK's NSPCC charity, published [figures](#) about delivering rising numbers of counselling sessions to youngsters struggling with eating disorders last year. This is concerning and illustrates the ongoing issue of disordered issues and psychological problems within young children.

Psychological Aspect

As mentioned above, emotional and psychological issues tend to be at the root of many weight and eating issues children have.

According to a [study](#), late onset or chronic obesity is a predictor of low self-esteem as children grow up. Those with weight issues in the study were also those with low general, social and academic/school-related self-esteem. Children who successfully reduced their weight showed equal or higher levels of self-esteem than those who were generally underweight or 'normal' weight. The study also found that overweight or obese children were more vulnerable to having low self-esteem in all of their environments, including non-domestic.

There is a lot of information out there about body positivity in today's society. I think it is more useful for children to feel self-positive so there is less focus on the body, and more on the self as a whole. From this perspective, we can see past physical appearances and can understand the root of the person and what is actually going on.

This can be difficult in a society where appearance, weight and looks are a huge focus not only culturally, but also in terms of being big business. This is where it comes down to the parents, caregivers and educators to offer healthy ways of being, healthy habits, coping mechanisms and life tools to counteract the generalised beauty standards and norms from mainstream culture that can be harmful.

A healthy, balanced life is the aim and that goes beyond weight - this is why focusing just on weight issues only goes so far into addressing the root cause of the problem. Looking skin deep is not a solution to weight issues - children need emotional and psychological support to overcome their struggles.

Children Can Still Flourish

Instilling a strong sense of self, self-esteem and self-worth within our children is very important to avoid emotional issues that lead to eating disorders and weight problems. However, weight problems can develop for a range of reasons, so, if your child does

struggle with their weight, it is important to adopt a supportive and proactive approach to ensure they can learn how to manage themselves in a calmer way.



Offering alternative, beneficial coping mechanisms is a must, so that when they feel stressed, anxious or sad they have a toolkit to help them overcome the hurdle they are experiencing. Ensuring children have a [healthy role model](#) is also a great way to show them what healthy, calm living looks like - as parents this is your role.

With love, kindness and support children can flourish, irrespective of the difficulties they are experiencing.

Checklist—Ways to Support Your Child in Getting Along with Themselves

1. Avoid restrictive diets or disordered eating in the family home, and model healthy eating habits for children to follow.
2. Encourage positive self-talk for children, by avoiding 'blaming willpower' in discussions about food, weight or habits in general.
3. For children who do struggle with disordered eating, providing a supportive, helpful, constructive guide to help them [develop healthy habits](#) is key to avoiding instilling guilt or shame. You can use some of our [printables about the human body](#) and

health to start a conversation about good habits.

4. Problems with food and weight start in the home, and in the head. Providing psychological and emotional support is key for children who have weight problems. Professional help can ensure they recover from emotional issues that manifest in food/eating-related symptoms.
5. Children need a toolkit of emotional, mental and physical coping mechanisms to provide alternative ways to deal with the stresses and anxieties of life. Yoga, exercise, journaling, drawing, talking and, where required, professional therapeutic support, are all ways to ensure children can live a healthy and supported life.

In the meantime, Kids Academy is always happy to be of help in your child's academic journey. Check out the learning resources on [our website](#) and the collection of our [learning apps for kids](#).

References:

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