

Weight Stigma

No matter what form it takes, making fun of people about their weight or eating can be really hurtful, even if you think you are “just joking.”

Just like it is never ok to tease people about things like race/ethnicity, it's not ok to tease people about their weight, appearance, or eating.

Examples of Stigmatization

- Being called names or made fun of/talking about what someone is wearing, what they look like or are what they are eating
- Being ignored/ignoring someone intentionally
- Being “accidentally” bumped into, tripped, elbowed; having things knocked off your desk or from your arms/purposefully “targeting” someone by knocking into her, talking about her
- Having rumors spread about you, having people talk about you/talking about someone, whispering about people in front of them, spreading rumors
- Having mean things posted about you on a website (e.g., Facebook)/posting mean things to someone's page or about them where other people can read them
- Not being invited to parties, being excluded from tables at lunch or groups at school/not including someone in activities, not allowing someone to join
- Being sent mean e-mails, receiving harassing calls or e-mails

If you are teased or want to be supportive to others who are, here are some tips!

1. **Ignore the comments.** This can be hard to do but not giving a reaction and moving on from the situation might help minimize the amount of attention to the situation and might result in people leaving you alone in the future
2. **Be confident.** Don't let someone take away from you all that is positive and good about who you are.
3. **Stick with supportive friends and being a supportive friend.**
4. **Stop bullying when you see it.** You can make it clear to your friends and to other people that you don't think teasing is ok.

This might also help other people feel better about stepping in later in the future.

5. **Get help.** If a situation is bad, keeps happening, or you think you or someone else is really hurt (physically or emotionally), talk to a teacher, counselor, or parent and get some help to stop the teasing.

Ways NOT to respond:

1. **DO NOT Insult the person who is doing the teasing** - do you really want to stoop to their level? There is no reason for this and it might result in increased teasing towards you or continued harassment. It might also get you into trouble at school.
2. **DO NOT respond with any body part other than your mouth**- physical reactions to teasing can get you in serious trouble and is never the right solution to teasing.
3. **DO NOT make comments about other people to draw attention away from you.** This doesn't help the situation and just makes it look like it is ok to treat other people this way.

Family Influence

Sometimes our families make jokes or references to our appearance without really thinking. This can be even worse when it comes from family members.

There are a few ways you can go about this.

1. **Talk to the person directly:** Usually family members don't want to hurt our feelings, so they probably don't understand that their teasing is hurtful. Sit down with the person and start by saying "That really makes me feel bad"
2. **Enlist another family member to help you out:** If your sibling or a parent is doing the teasing, talk to another parent or grandparent and let them know how much is hurting you. There is strength in numbers, so a family member might be more receptive you asking them to stop if you have some more family with you.

3. **Nip it in the bud:** The minute someone says something that hurts your feelings, let them know. If you wait until they forget what they said, the moment will be lost. Stop the conversation after they make the comment, or slip them a note that says "that really hurt" if you don't want others to hear.

Finally, make sure that you aren't the one who is doing the teasing.

MYTHS and FACTS about OBESITY

- **MYTH:** Obesity is only caused by eating too much and being lazy.
- **FACT:** Obesity is caused by complex genetic and environmental factors.
- **MYTH:** All overweight people are unhealthy.
- **FACT:** Health comes in different sizes.
- **MYTH:** Prejudice against overweight people is harmless and encourages weight loss.
- **FACT:** Prejudice against overweight people is harmful, wrong, and can have a negative impact on health.

For more information on weight stigma visit:
http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/what_we_do.aspx?id=197

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