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www.healthyweightcommit.org

“Parent’s As Influencers”

The Parent’s Role in Eating Disorder Prevention

Parents play a key role in the prevention of eating disorders. Beginning in their children’s early years and throughout their lives, parents have a tremendous amount of influence over bolstering a child’s physical and emotional health. While many parents believe it is their children’s peers who have the greater influence, research shows this is not the case.

With that said, there are specific factors that lead to eating disorders. The following reviews the predominate factors and provides recommendations on how parents can effectively influence them.

- **Factor # 1** - Genetics determine body shape and size and also influence a person’s susceptibility to developing an eating disorder. In addition to that noted below, if eating disorders are a part of your family history, it is imperative that you let your children’s physicians know.

Focus on Physical and Emotional Health at Every Size:

There is no one “perfect” shape or size, although much of what our children see makes them believe it is so. Just as each child has their own unique personality, so do they have unique physical attributes.

- *Teach your children to understand that their physical make-up was predetermined long before their birth. That while they have control over how they power, nourish and use their body, trying to fight against that which nature has predetermined can be futile and harmful. Help them accept and respect the natural diversity of body sizes and shapes, using the respect of your own body as an example.*
- **Factor # 2** - Risk factors for developing disordered eating patterns include depression, sexual abuse, alcohol or drug dependency, anxiety and obsessive/compulsive disorders.

Make Time for Family Meals:

Making time for meals that offer “face time” with family, and eliminates “screen time” alone, provides parents with opportunities to fully engage with their children and model healthy relationships with food and their bodies.



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- *Teach your children through your behavior, how meal time together is about eating in a manner that values pleasure and honors internal cues of hunger, satiety, and appetite. That the time together provides opportunities for everyone to share their day's stories, while supporting one another's positive activities and behaviors.*

- **Factor # 3** - Media and cultural messages that promote body dissatisfaction and dieting.

Teach Media Literacy:

Television, magazines, newspapers, the internet, music and radio shows, send hundreds of messages to our kids every day. Inherent in much of that messaging is that you must be thin to be beautiful. While there is no way to avoid the messages all together, you can teach your children to challenge those messages.

- *Teach your children to ask simple questions: Who created the message? Who is being represented in the message? Why was this message sent? Is the messenger simply trying to make me feel uncomfortable or less confident about myself, so I will buy what they are selling?*