



HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

4 Positive Alternatives & Responses to
Food and Body Comments



It's the holidays, and you're at your grandparents' house with your kids, reconnecting with aunts, uncles, and cousins you haven't seen in years. You know your views differ on many topics—politics, religion—but what about food and body image?

Here are four common holiday comments about food and body that are too often harmful to young people.

Whether you're just learning why some remarks can be harmful or looking for ways to shift the conversation, you're not alone. Here is what we have learned.

1 “Wow, you look great! Have you lost weight?”

This one often catches people off guard! While it may seem like a compliment at first, it suggests that weight and weight loss is what makes us look great (and, therefore, weight gain makes us not look great). Weight loss can result from various factors, and for those struggling with disordered eating or illness, it may represent the opposite of health. Praising weight loss can inadvertently encourage unhealthy behaviors.

Kids are keen observers; they notice what we admire and criticize, reflecting our values. They also do not distinguish body from “self.” To a young person, the body and appearance IS the person. Therefore, when we comment on body and appearance, kids hear it as us commenting on the value of a person based on how they look. Since they look up to us, they may begin to prioritize these superficial qualities to earn our approval. Let's choose our words wisely and emphasize qualities that matter more than appearance or size.



What to Say Instead: “It’s great to see you!”

By using this phrase instead, we shift the focus away from weight and appearance and instead highlight our excitement about spending time together.

How to Respond

A box to the right: As parents, it can be challenging to know how to respond when adults make upsetting comments to our kids. We've provided a few ideas to help you respond in the moment, whether you want to challenge misconceptions or shift the conversation, depending on what feels right. We hope these suggestions inspire meaningful discussions and foster healthy body image and positive relationships with food this holiday season!

- » **Invite them to explore the beliefs beneath their comment:** "What's looking great have to do with weight loss?"
- » **Change the subject:** "Talking about weight is so boring. How was your Thanksgiving?"
- » **Set boundaries:** "I know you mean well, but I'd prefer if you didn't comment on weight and appearance around my kids. Thank you for understanding."

2 "Are you sure they should have a second helping?"

The holidays often bring families together over meals, which can include large quantities of food, some of which may be less nutritious. It's common for others to comment on how much—or how little—kids eat based on their own views of health and nutrition, often influenced by diet culture. Unfortunately, these comments can focus on appearance, leading to targeted remarks about certain children and potentially causing shame. This can be detrimental to a child's self-concept and their relationship with food.

What to Say Instead: Nothing

We recommend leaving feeding guidance to the parent, who has a more comprehensive understanding of their child's health beyond just their appearance or eating habits during one meal. It's crucial to avoid making these comments to or around the child. When reflecting on your concerns, ask yourself: "Why am I worried? Does this relate to the child's appearance? Would I have the same concern for all kids, regardless of their shape or weight?"

How to Respond

- » "Yep!"
- » "No need to worry. [Child's name] knows their body best and is great at deciding for her/himself."
- » "We like to listen to our bodies. Sometimes we want more food and sometimes we want less food."



3 “Oh, you shouldn’t eat that, it’s bad for you!”

A part of holidays and celebrations includes delicious desserts and sweets. Whether it’s pumpkin pie or a special dessert from your family’s culture, these foods can enhance holiday celebrations and foster connections. Labeling foods as “unhealthy,” “fattening,” or “bad” can lead kids to feel guilty about enjoying them.

What to Say Instead: Nothing

You can make the food choices that are right for you, but it’s important not to link those decisions to being “good” or “bad,” especially with kids listening.



How to Respond

“I love this dessert for its tastiness and tradition. All foods have a place. Maybe we don’t eat it for every meal, but it sure fits for today.”

“Actually, all foods have a place in our lives! In our family, we focus on balance.”



4

“Let’s go play football to burn off all those calories you just ate!”

Turkey Trots and family football games are fun physical activities often tied to holiday traditions. However, it’s easy to connect exercise with our holiday meals. Adults sometimes talk about movement as a way to burn calories, lose weight, or “make up” for how they eat. This mindset can confuse kids, leading them to see exercise as a means to change their appearance. It also implies that enjoying certain foods or quantities is something negative, creating a notion that they must “pay the price” with exercise.

What to Say Instead: “Let’s go play football!”

Our body size involves many factors beyond just diet and exercise, and food and activity are about more than just changing how we look. Let’s keep these ideas separate for kids so they can develop positive attitudes towards food, their bodies, and staying active.

How to Respond

- “I would love to, but simply because it’s fun and I enjoy spending time with you.”
- “No, thank you. I don’t feel like playing football right now.”

If these ideas feel new or surprising, you’re not alone. Our society often runs on autopilot, reinforcing the false belief that appearance and size define health and well-being. Together, we’re embracing conversations and a way of living that promote true health—not just for our young people, but for ourselves as well. Challenging the status quo isn’t easy—because it’s not meant to be. But it’s through this effort that we make a healthier world for young people, together.

Thank you for the love and support you give to the kids in your life. Your words and care mean the world to them—and to us.

Happy Holidays!

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