

WHAT to SAY

WithAll 

GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for all you do for my kid and all the kids in your class!

I recently learned that we, as adult role models, and the words we use about food and body image have a significant impact on kids. Will you please join me in helping protect kids' health, particularly as it relates to how we talk about food and body?

At Lunchtime & In Everyday Conversations

- **Avoid food policing (i.e., asking kids to eat or avoid foods, or eat foods in a certain order)**
 - Use lunchtime as an opportunity to focus on bonding (ask them questions, make jokes, listen to stories) and making mealtimes fun and stress-free (one of the leading preventive measures for eating disorders).
- **Avoid assigning a moral value to food (i.e., "healthy/unhealthy," "clean/junk," "good/bad"). This often creates shame, which often leads to dieting, the leading indicator of a child going on to develop an eating disorder.**



**COMMON
(HARMFUL)
PHRASE**

"Sugar is unhealthy or bad."



**SIMPLE
(POSITIVE)
SWAP**

"Too much of anything is not the best for my body. I try to eat a variety of lots of different foods."

- **Try to give compliments that are not appearance-based. When kids value their insides, they are much more likely to take care of their health in ways that matter more than being a specific weight or size.**



**COMMON
(HARMFUL)
PHRASE**

"You look so great today!"



**SIMPLE
(POSITIVE)
SWAP**

"It is so good to see you today!"

While Teaching

As a teacher, often you inherit and cannot change the curriculum—some of which may be heavily influenced by diet culture. Even if you are unable to change the curriculum or textbook, you can frame the content and help students think critically in these areas. Here are some tips to consider:

- **When setting your classroom rules or agreements at the start of the school year, consider adding "no body or appearance comments allowed."** Remind the kids that each of us have a body that is special and unique, and it is not okay or permissible to comment on another person's body or appearance.
- **Consider the books you have or read in your classroom: do they comment on weight or size and make moral judgments of foods or based on appearance?** How are bodies represented in the books – as impossibly thin or muscular? Consider discontinuing use of those books if possible.
- **If teaching a health unit, avoid weight or BMI as a primary indicator of health.** Health is bigger than either of these measures, and focusing on them, especially when different kids are at different places in their growth trajectory, sets your students up to feel shame or feel bad about their bodies. See here for more: [2016 American Academy of Pediatrics' policy statement](https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/140/6/e20173034/38277/Stigma-Experienced-by-Children-and-Adolescents)¹



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¹ <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/140/6/e20173034/38277/Stigma-Experienced-by-Children-and-Adolescents>

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Support This Work

This guide is one piece of WithAll's work to help kids feel good in their bodies and with food. That work only happens because individuals and businesses fund it directly. If it helped you, consider making a gift at withall.org/donate.

Get Financial Help

If you or someone you love is facing an eating disorder, you are not alone. Our Recovery Support Program provides grants for groceries and housing during intensive treatment. Apply at withall.org/apply.