

# CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT IN THE COMMUNITY

## Satter Feeding Dynamics Approach\*

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### 1. Consider the broader context.

- a. The “crisis of child overweight” is actually a crisis of *feeding*—and *parenting*. Child overweight is a symptom of that larger crisis.
- b. From birth and throughout the growing-up years, child overweight can be prevented by providing a positive environment that supports normal growth and development in all children.
- c. That positive environment includes economics, safety, food security and safe places to play.

### 2. Emphasize the whole child.

- a. Seek community-based approaches and networks that emphasize raising happy, healthy, productive children, whatever their size.
- b. Emphasize programs that nurture children nutritionally, physically and emotionally, and allow each child to grow in his or her constitutionally appropriate way.
- c. Get the emphasis *off* diagnosis and treatment and *on* to supporting normal growth and development.
- d. Avoid labeling, and avoid prioritizing weight-management programs. Children who are labeled overweight feel flawed in every way—not smart, not physically capable and not worthy.

### 3. Have teaching and supporting *optimum* feeding be a shared understanding, value and practice in all agencies, both public and private.

Children are born *wanting* to eat, knowing *how much* to eat and inclined to *grow* in the way that nature intended. Good parenting with feeding preserves those qualities.

- a. Use *Ellyn Satter’s Division of Responsibility in Feeding* as a basis for *all* child-feeding policies and practice. Properly executed, the division of responsibility addresses concerns about optimum feeding, such as breastfeeding promotion and support, and concerns about food selection and the food supply, such as encouraging fruits and vegetables and using moderation with fat and sugar. It also addresses concerns about the larger food environment, such as too-ready access to soda, fast food, large portion sizes and advertising directed at children.
- b. The core messages and attitudes about feeding and parenting are incorporated in all agencies that are instrumental in feeding, parenting, health care, or parent education.
- c. Adults take the initiative and responsibility for choosing food and seeing to it that children get fed at regular and reliable times. Trusted adults eat with young children.
- d. Incorporate public services messages, such as Five-a-Day, into the feeding dynamics model. Grownups include fruits and vegetables at *meals*, then let children decide whether or not to eat them.
- e. Stress letting children eat as much or as little as they want from what their grownups provide at regular and predictable eating times.
- f. Maintain the structure of meals and snacks. Do not let children have free access to food or flavored beverages between meal- and snack times.
- g. Emphasize and teach developmentally appropriate feeding in all agencies, public and private. These agencies include both outpatient and inpatient health care (medical, dental, prenatal, pediatric, family), public health (WIC and other programs), child care, education (Head Start, public schools, parent-teacher organizations) and faith-based organizations.

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4. **Emphasize *providing*, not *depriving*.**
  - a. Emphasize the family meal in all nutrition and parenting education and intervention.
  - b. Support families in feeding their children by addressing food security issues, increasing minimum wage, supporting high-quality child care, supporting conveniently located grocery stores whose prices reflect current market prices, funding school breakfast and school lunch and funding supplemental nutrition programs.
  - c. Avoid interventions and messages intended to get children to eat less or weigh less.
  - d. Avoid messages that complicate family meals and take away from the pleasure of eating, food selection and food preparation. Adults need to find eating and feeding satisfying to be reliable in providing for children.
5. **Protect family time, including family *mealtimes*.**
  - a. Have preserving family mealtimes be a shared value in all private and public agencies.
  - b. Make scheduling decisions that respect and defend family meal time. Avoid practices and events at times that compete with family meals.
6. **Have teaching and supporting *optimum* activity be a shared understanding, value and practice in all agencies, both public and private.** Children are born loving their bodies, curious about them, inclined to move and driven to be as physically competent as they can possibly be. Good parenting with activity preserves those qualities throughout the growing-up years
  - a. Supporting children's activity depends on a division of responsibility. Adults provide *structure, safety* and *opportunities*. Children choose *how much* and *whether* to move and the *manner* of moving.
  - b. Support community planning to support children's natural activity, particularly for parents whose financial or personal circumstances limit their ability to provide structure, safety or opportunities.
  - c. Provide safe play spaces.
  - d. Provide sidewalks and traffic patterns that allow children to walk, run and ride bikes.
  - e. Provide school crossing guards.
  - f. Support the shared value of limiting children's access to television and videotapes.
7. **Use a consistent and empowering approach to child overweight identification and intervention among all relevant agencies.** Define child overweight as *growth acceleration*: Abnormal upward weight divergence for the *individual* child. This definition avoids labeling as overweight the child whose weight, weight-for-height or BMI are above a certain percentile but who is growing consistently. It also allows identifying for early intervention the child whose measurements fall closer to the mean but is nonetheless diverging considerably from his or her previously established growth pattern.
  - a. In primary care and education, emphasize *supporting each child's normal growth and development* rather than *avoiding overweight*.
  - b. Help parents prevent child overweight *from birth* by teaching, supporting and emphasizing appropriate feeding and parenting.
  - c. Help parents identify and enact solutions to their child's weight acceleration based on the division of responsibility in feeding and the division of responsibility in activity.
8. **In analyzing community-wide trends in the causes of child overweight, use the definition of child overweight as *weight acceleration*, not arbitrary cutoffs.**
  - a. Consider the causes of weight acceleration from the perspective of the *whole child*: Misinterpretation of normal growth, restrained feeding, poor feeding practices and/or stress.
  - b. Consider the implications of those patterns on services and community supports for families and children.