

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, **we adult role models, and the words we use related to food and body image really affect 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 or music) 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 lead 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 inside, 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 judgements 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 body. See here for more: [2016 American Academy of Pediatrics’ policy statement¹](#)

Want to learn more?

Visit www.whattosayNOW.org and sign the What to Say pledge to receive more information on these topics, package in simple, easy-to-digest emails.

WithAll also provides presentations to groups of adults full of practical ways to set kids up for a healthy body image and a lifelong balanced relationship with food. Contact us at www.whattosaynow.org/organizations/ to learn more or request a presentation for your next workshop day or your local PTO group.

Thank you for all the ways you love and support the kids in your life. Your words mean so much to them and your desire to support their health and well-being means the world to them and us.



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What to Say Guide for Teachers is made possible through the generous support of RBC Wealth Management.

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