

About one-third of children in the United States are overweight or obese. Research has shown that overweight and obese children are more likely to be bullies or be victims of bullies than their average-weight peers.

### What Parents Need to Know

- **Same-age peers are not the only bullies.** Research suggests that overweight and obese youth can be teased or bullied by family members, including parents, and by educators.
- **The cafeteria and gym are “bullying hot spots.”** Weight-related bullying often occurs when children are eating in the cafeteria during lunch or when they are expected to be active, such as during gym class or when participating in sports.
- **Victims of bullying sometimes bully others.** When a child is being bullied, they may bully someone else as a way to “look cool” or try to feel better about themselves. A child who is overweight may be both the victim and the bully, at different times.
- **Children sometimes are blamed for being overweight.** People sometimes tease others about their weight because they see being overweight or obese as the “child’s fault.” However, there are a number of factors that can impact weight.

### Warning Signs Your Child Is Being Bullied About Their Weight

A child or youth that is being teased or bullied about their weight may:

- Avoid sports or gym class
- Avoid playing outside or going to playgrounds, parks, etc.
- Not want to eat in front of other children or adults
- Increase their emotional eating or sneaking of foods
- Avoid certain clothing, such as shorts or T-shirts
- Experience depressed mood, sadness, withdrawal and/or changes in sleeping patterns.

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## The impact of weight-related bullying

- Many children who are teased about being overweight will eat to cope with the negative feelings they have about themselves — leading to increased weight gain.
- When children are bullied at a young age, it can affect school success and friendships in addition to the health challenges many overweight and obese children already face.

## Strategies to Handle Weight-Related Teasing and Bullying

### Tips for Parents

- **Check in with your child**
  - Try to set aside five to 10 minutes each night to talk about your child's day.
  - Good two-way communication can help prevent future problems from occurring.
- **Support your child**
  - Let him know that being bullied about his weight is not OK. He does not deserve it.
- **Enroll your child in helpful programs**
  - Support healthy habits that lead to changes in health behaviors.
  - Help your child feel more confident about their body and appearance.
  - Help provide coping skills for parents and children to use when a child is being teased.
- **Encourage new friendships**
  - Help your child develop a set of friends who they can trust will treat them nicely.
  - Consider ways your child can find friends outside of the school setting where there is adult supervision.
  - If the bullying is occurring online, help your child delete accounts, create new ones and block unfriendly peers.
- **Consider professional counseling**
  - A school counselor, psychologist or private therapist has the experience to help your child talk about and cope more successfully with weight-related teasing and bullying.
- **Work with your child's school**
  - Ask for our “Helping a Child Who Is Being Bullied” fact sheet for tips to work with your child's school to respond effectively to specific incidents of bullying.

### Tips to Share with Youth

- **It is not appropriate for any child or adult to make negative comments about your body or your weight.**
- **Say positive things to yourself in your head.**
  - “I do not deserve to be talked to this way.”
  - “I can get through this.”
  - “Things won't always be this way.”
- **It is best not to try to fight back with the bully.** Be calm, and do something to act as if you do not care (e.g., walk away or make a joke).
- **Tell an adult who can help and support you.**

*The “All About Bullying” fact sheets are brought to you by the Partner for Prevention Program at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Violence Prevention Initiative, a Hospital-wide effort to interrupt the cycle of violence. For more information about bullying, visit [chop.edu/violence](http://chop.edu/violence).*