

PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF DISCUSSING THEIR PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILD'S WEIGHT IN PRIMARY CARE

SUMMARY

Primary care settings are key to initiating childhood obesity interventions. Drawing on interviews with 17 parents who took part in a randomised controlled trial for childhood obesity in Stockholm County, Sweden, we explored how parents of young children experienced weight-related conversations with paediatric nurses.

Parents identified weight-related conversations as difficult but important catalysts for lifestyle changes. Parents felt empowered when nurses used a responsive communication style and non-blaming language, with a focus on healthy habits rather than weight. However, when nurses provided generic advice and used alarmist or judgmental language, parents felt disempowered. Parents' reactions to weight-related conversations with nurses were important, as these conversations led to lifestyle changes that entailed emotional and social challenges.

Based on these findings, we recommend that communication skills training, with a focus on childhood obesity, be offered to all paediatric clinicians.

We have also developed the following practical recommendations for paediatric clinicians:

- Structure the conversation as a dialogue: begin by asking parents how they feel about their child's growth and development, and tailor the conversation to their perceptions and understandings. Invite parents to ask questions.
- Consider each family's position: ask parents what they think, how they feel, and how they would like to proceed. Work with their responses to offer personalised advice with a focus on health and wellbeing.
- Use positive language and encouragement: emphasise what parents can do to introduce lifestyle changes, seek further support, and improve their child's weight status and future health.



For more information, visit www.stopchildobesity.eu

