

# Health At Every Size Concepts for Schools

## Traditional Approach

“Fat is bad for you”

BUT when fat is seen as a bad thing, the child feels she is bad. Fat is not something you have; it is something you are. We don't say, "You have fat," we say, "You are fat." We identify with our bodies. So the child gets the message that this fatness is badness.

## HAES Approach

“A healthy body is our goal” (don’t worry about the size—concentrate on health)

- Emphasize body trust. "Work with your body. Bodies say when they're hungry."
- Teach about diversity. "People come in all different weights and heights."

Celebrate individuality. "You and your body are unique in all the world."

## Traditional Approach

“It would seem that if kids are getting heavier and this could be a problem medically, we should help them lose weight.”

## HAES Approach

How do we intervene? What can we change? What will do no harm, and what will make the child's life better?

- Take a weight neutral approach: Let go of trying to change weight and focus on supporting solid self-care skills.
- Assess eating. We have evidence that problems with eating can be treated. (Listen to body signals)
- Support exploring playful physical activity, -activity the child enjoys.
- Be culturally aware. Avoid being the authority figure finding fault for “being fat”  
If we are judgmental, we are "exporting" this problem (“thin is good” and “fat is bad”)

## Traditional Approach

“Kids do not eat healthy (good) food and eat too much junk (bad) food.” “Kids don’t get enough exercise.”

We need to teach them what the bad foods are and what the good foods are, and get them exercising more”

## **HAES Approach**

- Discuss nutrition in terms of "body fuel," rather than good/bad categories. Acknowledge that good taste matters. Encourage kids to choose what tastes good ***and also*** helps bodies perform.
- Develop a concept with the kids of a "hunger to move." Give it a name. They can identify with feeling fidgety, “feeling restless” too many rainy days in a row, or "rarin' to go," and the thrill of going a little farther.
- Develop times during the day when the class can take a physical break, even for a just a stretch or shout or interactive game. Make it routine/normal that bodies need to move and get stimulation.

Advocate in your own sphere for improvements in the quality of movement and food offered by your school

## **Make a Change in Your School’s Culture**

Teasing/making fun of size is one of the last more “socially acceptable” discriminations.

***Teasing and bullying of fat kids is widespread and harmful. Fat children and teens have killed themselves in despair about this harassment.***

How do we get our schools to take the problem seriously?

- Show admiration in front of the kids for people of integrity and accomplishment of all sizes.
- Develop a "no tolerance for teasing" policy and enforce it, the way you would enforce a sexual harassment policy for adults. Why should kids have to endure a "hostile work environment"?
- Many schools are already actively expressing support for diversity and teaching how to value differences and resolve conflicts. Use these programs to address discrimination based on body size and looks, too.

Teach other kids how to stand up for friends and form alliances with kids who are being humiliated. Explore the idea of being respected, not just being liked, for doing the right thing even when it is hard, even when it might make you the target of the bully next. Teach about the historical examples of why this skill is so critical to human civilization