

Lesson 2.1: Growing Healthy Children

Background (Read before you teach): In the United States, two-thirds of adults and one-third of children and youth are overweight or obese (USDA and DHHS, 2016; Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2014). Children who are obese are more likely to have high blood pressure and blood sugar levels, as well as psychological and social problems (Messiah et al., 2012; Breslin et al., 2012). They are also more likely to be obese as adults (Nguyen, Nguyen, Lane, & Wang, 2011) and develop type 2 diabetes, heart disease, or certain cancers.

Health professionals use [growth charts](#) from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to monitor a child's growth from birth through 19 years (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2013; Ward, 2008). These growth charts allow a comparison of an individual child's growth to that of other children in the United States. In particular, health professionals may be concerned when children gain weight faster than expected. These charts also help determine when children are gaining weight too slowly.

Many parents do not see their children as being overweight and are less concerned about any potential health risks (Ward 2008). Understanding how parents perceive their child's weight allows health professionals and educators to provide more effective advice (American AAP, 2015)

Teaching tips: This lesson is designed for providing personalized feedback on child growth, based on actual measurement of children's weight and height. We would not recommend simply distributing the personalized health report card without providing a lesson and discussion with the families. Thus, sharing the health report cards is a key part of the lesson. If community-level childhood obesity data are available, then it may be shared and discussed. If neither personalized nor community-level data are available, educators can review the health report card handout and encourage parents to discuss their child's growth with a health provider. Instead of actual community-level data, educators can use childhood obesity data from national studies, either for the general population or Latino/Hispanic children. The charts in this lesson for "Our community" are actually based on national data for Mexican-American children. The CDC uses the term "overweight" to refer to children between the 85th and 95th percentiles (yellow zone) and "obesity" for children at or above the 95th percentile (red zone). Based on recommendations from community members, we used the terms "at risk" rather than "overweight" and "overweight" rather than "obese" in this lesson.

Target Audience: Mexican-origin families with young children, ages 3 to 8 years

Key Message: Help children grow up being healthy by providing nutritious foods and opportunities for physical activity.

Objectives: By the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify the risks of childhood overweight;
- Describe the extent of the problem in the participants' community; and
- Discuss what families and communities can do to help children grow and develop normally.

Materials:

- Laptop, projector, and screen;
- Powerpoint slides;
- Pictures of children of different sizes --normal, overweight, obese (optional);
- Colored (8.5"X11") papers (2 red, 2 yellow, 2 green);
- Personalized health report cards;
- Referral sheets with phone numbers for local health clinic;
- [MyPlate](#) mini poster
- Recipes and food demonstration supplies (suggested Tasty Turkey Chili)

Handouts: recipes; health reports[referral sheets to a local clinic

Set-up: Set up projector, laptop, and slides. Tape the colored sheets of paper to a wall or easel.

Opening (Anchor): (10 min) Welcome!

Review what was covered last time and ask if families have made changes, based on their goals. Congratulate and encourage them to keep on trying.

Today, we will be talking about how parents can help their children to grow up being healthy.

Begin the discussion with an open-ended question. Choose one of the following:

- **Ask:** How have your lives changed since you were children? How is the way your children eat different from the way you ate when you were a child?; or
- Show a few photos of children (of different body sizes, sedentary or active) **Ask:** Can you tell which children have a healthy or unhealthy weight. With participant input, sort the pictures into 2 piles (healthy or unhealthy). **Ask:** How did you decide whether a child's weight is healthy or unhealthy? Is a chubby baby really healthy?

Lesson (Add): (15 min) Using the powerpoint slides as a visual aid, discuss the following points:

- **Ask:** How do we know if a child's growth is healthy, not too heavy or too thin? How many of you have talked with a doctor, nurse or maybe a WIC staff member about your child's growth? (Show slide of a growth chart with green, yellow, red zones) Has your health provider ever shown you a growth chart and explained what it means? How do parents feel when a provider says a child is overweight? (Listen carefully while parents share their feelings)



Figure 22. Child growth chart (Adapted from CDC.gov).

- It can be very difficult for parents to have this discussion with their child’s doctor. Let’s first use a story to explain what these terms mean. Imagine the differences between three boys (all born on same day, all the same height but 3 different weights). Using growth charts, a doctor compares a child’s weight to that of other healthy children *of the same age and sex*. Children with a healthy weight are in the green zone on the growth chart. Children who are heavier or gaining weight faster than *many children* are “at risk” of becoming overweight and in the yellow zone. Children who are heavier or gaining weight faster than *most children* are “overweight” and in the red zone.

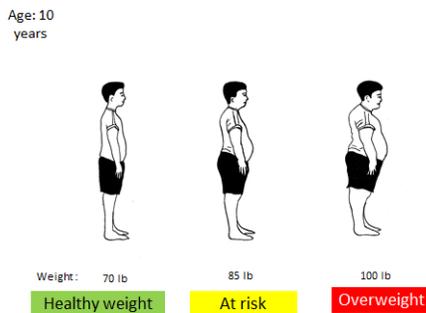


Figure 1. Children of different body sizes

Say: Many more children in both the US and Mexico now have an unhealthy weight (too heavy, too much body fat), compared to 30 years ago. The growth charts that doctors use are based on the growth of children at a time before overweight and diabetes became widespread health problems. (Point to the first row of colored papers). In a healthy population of children, most will have a healthy weight in the green zone and fewer will be in the yellow or red zones. (Cover up the boy with the healthy weight) Since so many children are now at risk or overweight, it can be hard to tell that a health problem exists.

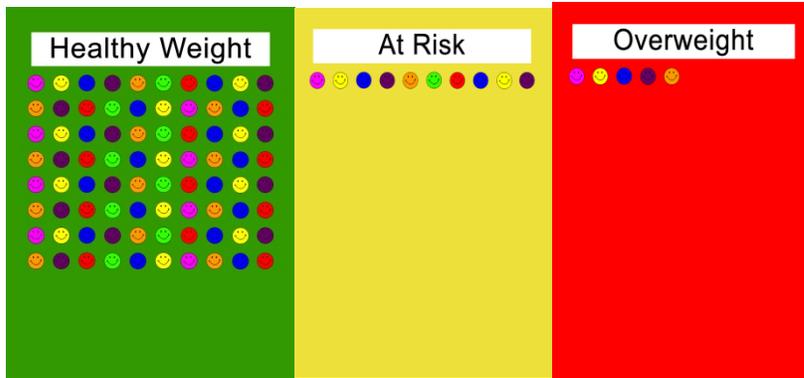


Figure 2. Example of children's weight status 30 years ago.

- **Say:** Now, let's see how many children are "at risk" or "overweight" in this community (Tape the other green, yellow, and red papers on the wall below. A comparison between the growth chart and actual situation in this community can be shown visually. Participants will see many more children from this community in the red and yellow zones.)



Figure 3. Example of children's weight status in a local community now

Childhood overweight is a common but serious health issue. All families need to work together to improve health of their children.

- **Ask:** What are the health risks for children who are at risk or overweight?

Summarize: Children who are in yellow or red zones are at increased risk of developing health problems, like high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, and diabetes, even in their teenage years. Children who are in yellow or red zone may also feel depressed and have more problems in school.

However, the good news for worried parents is that overweight children who grow into a healthier weight can reduce their risk of developing these health problems later in life.

Also, explain that some healthy weight children can still have poor diets (for example, not eating enough fruit, vegetables or whole grains). Often, there is room for improvement in diet and physical activity among all children.

- **Say:** If child's weight is in yellow or red zone, parents should go talk to a doctor. (Give out referral sheet to a local clinic). What might a doctor recommend if a child's weight is unhealthy?

Parents provide a healthy diet to all family members, not just to the child. (Show MyPlate poster and introduce the concepts—fill half the plate with fruit and vegetables and include whole grains, protein, and milk). A healthy diet is needed to help children continue to grow taller. Explain that weight gain needs to slow down or possibly not increase when a child is in the yellow or red zones. Ask your doctor about what is best for the child.

There are many other things that parents can do to promote healthy diet and physical activity. For example: serve more fruits and vegetables; offer water instead of sugary drinks; enjoy home-cooked family meals; go out to play with your children; limit TV/video games time.

Activity (Apply): (25 min) While the assistant sets-up the food demonstration, the educator distributes the health report cards to each family.

- Discuss in small groups: What do you think and feel about the information presented today? What changes can you make as a family? What do you need in your community to make those changes?
- Ask each group to share their ideas with the others.
- Food demonstration, tasting and sharing. Pass around the containers, showing the participants any foods that might be new or unfamiliar (for example, low-fat products, whole grain alternatives). Explain step-by-step how the food is prepared. Serve samples for tasting. **Ask:** What are some ways that your children can help prepare this recipe? How can you use it at home? What do you like about the recipe? What would you change?

Closing (Away): (10 min) Emphasize that families must not feel alone or ashamed if their child's weight is in the unhealthy zone. Instead, the way people live today is unhealthy for many children and adults worldwide. The earlier in life we begin to adopt healthy habits, the better. Pair-up and set specific goals (see back of health report card). What did you learn today? Choose a goal to work on this year from the back of the health report. Ask a friend or family member to help support you in reaching your goal. Invite participants to share their goals.

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