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Three Mistakes Parents Make With Overweight Kids

By Lisa Alexander

Most parents just feel helpless. They want the best for their kids, but in spite of everything we know about nutrition and exercise, most parents hope for the best and do little about their overweight kids.

My daughter Pari was small at birth, but quickly became a heavy baby. By the age of two, our pediatrician began intimating that Pari was putting on more weight than she needed. Until kindergarten, kids from our neighborhood, her day care or nursery school accepted Pari just as she was, and her size never came up. But when she started school, there was a whole new set of kids, and some would make comments about Pari's size.

Some were innocent observations; some comments were just down right mean. In first grade she was invited to a slumber party of a new friend, and told me she would be uncomfortable changing in front of the other girls because she was fat. This was a shocking moment for me, because now I understood that she felt badly about herself, that she had been giving thought to her size, and comparing herself to other children. What could I do? In my case, there were few resources, but that has changed.

As the author of Seven Steps to Get Your Child's Weight on Track and creator of The Pari Plan, it's clear to me that parents don't understand the pivotal role they play in the solution to a child's weight problem. In helping families across the country beat childhood obesity, I've identified the three crucial mistakes that parents make and the key actions parents must take to get control and start their child on the path to improvement:

Mistake #1: "She's Not Heavy." This is plain denial. Many parents refuse to be honest with themselves about their child's weight. They see the beautiful perfection of their child and turn a blind eye to a problem that is likely causing emotional pain in their child's life lowering the child's self-esteem and getting in the way of their child achieving her true potential.

Action Plan: Learn what a healthy weight for your child should be. Compare where your child is to where your child needs to be. Acknowledge this goal openly.

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Mistake #2: "He'll grow out of it." If only parents knew: Studies show that 50% of obese school-aged children will become obese adults. Children WON'T grow out of their weight problem.

Action Plan: You don't need to put your child on a crash diet, but you do need to get them on a healthy path with better food choices and exercise activities that will help them as they grow. Losing weight is not rocket science. But changing the habits and lifestyle of a family in today's busy world is difficult. Especially when the emotional well being of a fragile overweight child is at stake, parents need a plan and they need perseverance.

The good news is that the easiest time to get your child on track is between the ages of 4–12 when they are growing and still totally reliant upon their parents for their food and activity.

Mistake #3: "I've Tried Everything." Most parents simply give up. They may try something but usually not the right things – in the right way. Then they give up.

Action Plan: The secret is that you must put it all together in the correct way and you must commit to being successful. You must acknowledge that you are the only one that can make the difference and you must rally your entire family around your child's success. You can have a healthy child but only if you decide to make it the number one priority in your life.

As a mother of an overweight child, I made all these mistakes and more. I've experienced the helplessness and heartbreak a parent feels watching their child struggle with weight. But there is an important flipside to that pain: The joy of helping your child shed their weight, build their self-esteem and realize the potential you always knew they had.

Lisa Alexander is the creator of "The PariPlan—Seven Steps to Get Your Child's Weight on Track," a complete collection of tools, activities and simple steps to make it easy for parents to reduce their children's weight while building self esteem. You can learn more about childhood weight solutions and The PariPlan at

<http://www.pariplan.com>

Hey Dad, How do You Handle Your Kids Mistakes?

By Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC

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One of the most difficult parts of being a father is learning to accept your children's mistakes. It certainly can be easy to be loving, supportive, and helpful when your children are mistake-free, but most fathers who are paying attention don't find too many mistake-free periods of their children's lives.

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Let's be clear about our kids and their mistakes. There aren't too many kids who get up in the morning, rub their hands together and say, I wonder how I can screw up today and really bother my dad! Kids don't enjoy or want to make mistakes, it's just one of the ways that they learn about the world.

Kids usually try to do their best; but they're doing their best considering the resources they have at the time. Sometimes they're tired, sometimes they're easily distracted, and sometimes they're strong-willed, but they generally do the best they can. It's quite easy for us to unfairly judge them according to their best efforts in the past.

When our kids make mistakes, we have choices to make. Fathers can either make choices that help to create kids who are defensive and who lie to them ...or they can make choices that help to create kids who can learn from their mistakes and improve upon them.

Kids who fear punishment or the loss of love in response to their mistakes learn to hide their mistakes. These children live in two different places—one place where they have the love and support of their father (parents), and another where they feel that if their mistakes were discovered, they would be undeserving of that love. It's hard for these kids to fully accept their parents' love and support even when it is expressed. It's also difficult for these kids to set high standards for themselves, because they tend to be fearful of failing.

These are some ideas for fathers who are committed to helping create kids who can learn from their mistakes, and who are not afraid of making a few:

Absolutely accept the notion that your kids are doing their best, and that they'll learn faster about their mistakes if they are in an environment that accepts mistakes.

Understand that your difficulty with your kids' mistakes is in fact a reflection of your difficulty dealing with your own mistakes; be aware of this and deal with your own issues first.

Know the shaming messages that we can all give so easily to our kids—messages that can do a lot of damage to them and help them to feel unworthy. Here's a few of them:

- How could you have done that?
- You don't listen to me!
- You can do better than that!
- What's the matter with you?

Keep providing your kids with learning experiences, but at the same time structure their environment

so they can't make too many mistakes (having expensive glassware around the house where children might break it is not their fault).

Provide a great model for your children by the way you react to making mistakes: do you get defensive and stretch the truth, or do you own the mistake and learn something from it? Create a culture that's based on learning from mistakes.

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We only have one chance to show our kids the patience and discipline necessary to allow them to learn from the mistakes that we've all made. Your opportunity to improve just started now; give your kids the room that they need and deserve.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, is the author of *25 Secrets of Emotionally Intelligent Fathers* (http://www.markbrandenburg.com/e_book.htm#secrets). For more great tips and action steps for fathers, sign up for his FREE bi-weekly newsletter, *Dads, Don't Fix Your Kids*, at <http://www.markbrandenburg.com>



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