

## BEFORE YOU START THE CONVERSATION

### Things to consider

To foster positive conversations about health behaviours and weight, it is important to create a safe environment where healthcare professionals, children and their families feel comfortable sharing openly. People with weight-related concerns may be reluctant to speak to their healthcare professional due to fear of judgement, scolding or humiliation.<sup>25</sup> Creating an atmosphere that demonstrates respect, understanding and openness will invite children and families to comfortably participate in conversations.

Here are key considerations to keep in mind:



1.

#### Understand that obesity is not a personal choice

- Obesity is complex and attributed to a variety of different factors including environment, genetics, health behaviours, emotional health, medical issues and medications.<sup>22</sup>



2.

#### Recognize your own biases

- Weight bias refers to negative weight-related attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and judgements toward individuals living with obesity<sup>23</sup> and is common everywhere, even in healthcare.
- Experiencing weight bias has many negative consequences, including feelings of shame and guilt, mental health issues (e.g. anxiety, depression), poor self-esteem and body dissatisfaction, as well as unhealthy weight-control practices, increased cortisol secretion and weight gain.<sup>23, 24</sup>
- Recognizing our own biases is a first important step in avoiding discriminating against people living with obesity.<sup>25</sup>
- Research shows that shaming, blaming, teasing and stigmatizing does not motivate positive behavior change; it promotes the opposite.<sup>26-29</sup>



3.

#### Ensure the physical environment is private, quiet and comfortable

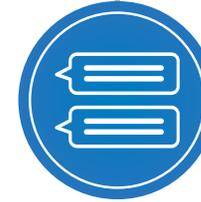
- Key considerations include: room arrangement, availability of appropriate equipment, comfortable seating for all body sizes and privacy.
- When having the conversation directly with the child, give them a few minutes alone before or after talking with families, where appropriate.



4.

#### Allow for dedicated time to have discussions

- Talking about obesity and weight can be difficult. Set aside protected and dedicated time (across several visits if necessary) to ensure that these conversations are not rushed.



5.

#### Be mindful of the words you choose and how the child and family responds to your wording

- Be aware that terminology may be received differently by children and families. Be prepared to explore with families what **their** acceptable terms are.
- Agree upon a cue that the child and family can give the healthcare professional to indicate that it is a 'safe time to talk'.



6.

#### Prepare resources to support the child and family

- It is important not to overwhelm children and their families with information.
- Consider using resources that address varied ages, family circumstances, cultural beliefs and values, and that are in different formats such as binders, books, colouring sheets, etc. Many different resources are provided in this Casebook that may be helpful.