

Communicating with Compassion and Respect to Dispel Weight Stigma

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Strategies to facilitate supportive communication

- 1 Engage in active and reflective listening
- 2 Use sensitive and respectful language
- 3 Acknowledge patients' prior experiences
- 4 Focus on health behaviors, not weight
- 5 Engage in collaborative goal setting

Active and reflective listening

Active listening

- Seek to understand
- Open-ended questions
- Notice nonverbal cues
- Withhold judgment

Reflective listening

- Reflect patients' comments back to them to confirm understanding
- Repeat or paraphrase
- Reflect patient's feelings

- ✓ Eases patient fear/anxiety
- ✓ Promotes patient engagement
- ✓ Increases respect and trust
- ✓ Patient feels heard, understood
- ✓ Confirms your understanding
- ✓ Clarifies expectations

Using the OARS approach

O Open-ended questions

*How do you feel about your weight and health?
Can you say more about that?
Can you tell me more about _____?*

A Affirmative statements

*I can understand why you feel this way.
I can see you are dedicated to improving your health.
Thank you for your willingness to discuss this with me today.*

R Reflective listening

*I hear you saying that...
So, you're feeling...
It sounds like you feel _____ about _____*

S Summary reflections

*To summarize what you've said today, I hear you saying that...
Here's what I've heard from you...
So, my understanding of what you've described is _____. Is this correct?*

Respectful terminology about weight

Preferred terminology:

- ✓ Weight
- ✓ High weight
- ✓ High body weight
- ✓ Unhealthy weight

Initiate by asking permission	Patient response	Provider follow-up response	Next step
<i>Could we talk about your weight today?</i>	Yes	<i>What words do you prefer to describe your weight?</i>	<i>(use patient's preferred terms): How do you feel about your [weight]?</i>
<i>Would it be okay for us to discuss your weight?</i>	No	<i>That is okay.</i>	<i>I'm here if you change your mind and would like to talk about this in the future</i>

Consider language about health behaviors

INSTEAD OF:



'excuses'...

'discipline' or 'self-control'...

'cheating'...

'resist temptations'...

'don't overindulge'...

TALK ABOUT:



...strategies to minimize triggers

...ways to practice healthy habits

...situations that create challenges
in staying on track

...how to cope with emotions or
cravings that influence eating behaviors

...ways to feel satisfied, not deprived

Acknowledge patients' prior experiences

Prior experiences
of weight loss and
weight regain



- *Many patients have previously implemented lifestyle changes*
 - Limited weight reduction
 - Weight regain
 - Frustration, shame, or discouragement

Prior experiences
of weight stigma



- *Patients may have experienced weight stigma in healthcare*
 - Anticipate stigma from healthcare providers
 - Hesitant to discuss weight
 - More likely to avoid healthcare topics or check-ups

- ✓ Acknowledge the patient's experiences
- ✓ Validate the patient's feelings
- ✓ Communicate without judgment
- ✓ Acknowledge the challenges of weight reduction
- ✓ Recognize the presence of weight stigma in society and healthcare
- ✓ Approach conversations with compassion

Focus on health behavior, not weight

Recognize the limitations of using BMI to assess obesity and health

- ✓ Focus on health, rather than BMI
- ✓ Place value on non-scale victories
- ✓ Emphasize health behavior changes
- ✓ Consider patient symptoms independent of BMI
- ✓ Discuss goals in terms of improving health indices rather than weight loss
- ✓ Avoid assuming that weight status is the cause of patient symptoms

Respect patients' readiness for change

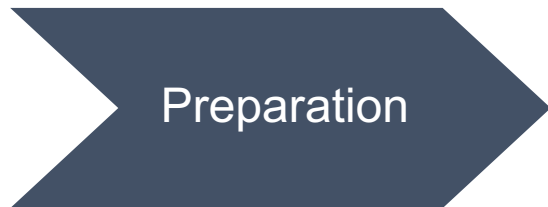
Stage of Change



Not considering health behavior change



Ambivalent about health behavior change



Committed to making health behavior change



Actively engaged in changing health behavior(s)

Motivational Interviewing

- *I hear you saying that you are not ready to change your health behavior right now.*
- *Could you tell me what leads you to feel this way?*
- *What is a benefit of changing your [health behavior]? What is a drawback of making this change?*
- *After thinking more about this, if you feel you would like to make some changes, I am here to help.*
- *What is one change you could make that would be achievable and could be beneficial to your health?*
- *Which family members and friends could support you as you make this change?*
- *In what ways can I be helpful to you as you continue to implement these changes?*

Engage in collaborative goal setting

SMART Goals:

SPECIFIC – how much and what type of behavior

MEASURABLE – for assessing progress over time

ACHIEVABLE – realistic given patient’s resources and barriers

RELEVANT – targeted behavior change aligns with patient’s goal

TIME-BOUND – timeline for goal initiation and review of progress

EXAMPLES




*Walk 30 minutes at lunch time,
5 days/week.*

*Eat 1 serving of fruit at breakfast
every morning.*

*Go to bed at 10:30pm each night starting
this Sunday. Reassess in 4 weeks.*

Summary: What to avoid

When communicating with patients about weight-related health, avoid the following:

-  Focusing only on BMI and weight loss
-  Oversimplifying the etiology of obesity and body weight regulation
-  Making assumptions about a patient's current or past health behaviors
-  Assuming that the patient wants to lose weight
-  Weight terminology that patients dislike
-  Language that implies blame or judgement of patients

Summary: What to prioritize

Instead, prioritize the following in your communication:



Establish rapport and trust

Discuss benefits of health behavior change

Use respectful, patient-centered language

Acknowledge the complex etiology of obesity

Ask permission to discuss patient's weight

Respect patient's freedom to make own decisions

Ask patient for preferred word to describe weight

Collaborate to identify realistic, sustainable goals

Engage in active and reflective listening

Keep door open for future communication

Prioritize health behaviors rather than BMI

Maximize success of communication with patients

Practicing Conscious Awareness

Self-reflection is part of the journey of self-discovery and learning. Understanding our own biases is a key first step in creating actionable change. Continuing to examine our biases through ongoing, reflective practice can create new awareness and knowledge to foster the kinds of attitude and behavioral changes needed to provide more compassionate patient care.

When we are busy or distracted, we are more likely to make biased decisions. Practicing conscious awareness can reduce the impact of unconscious bias on our choices and behaviors. To practice conscious awareness and work toward actionable change, these strategies can be useful:

- Acknowledge and accept that you have bias.
- Recognize stereotypical thinking: Catch yourself in the moment when a biased thought enters your mind and challenge the thought.
- When you recognize a bias, try to substitute this thought with new information that has been learned.
- Consciously consider the language you use to talk about obesity and people with higher body weight.
- Get feedback from others: solicit feedback from your team about potential blindspots you may have, and whether aspects of your communication unintentionally reinforce bias.
- Engage with people of diverse body sizes and expose yourself to people who challenge common weight stereotypes.
- Seek out accurate literature, stories, documentaries, and other information that can help you to expand your views and consider other perspectives.

Citations: Click [here](#) for a list of relevant published research citations.

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Recognize your own attitudes and assumptions about weight

CREATING A WELCOMING AND SAFE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

Ensure that your clinic or medical office is well-equipped to accommodate patients with larger body sizes. Providing a safe and welcoming environment can improve patient care, reduce patient experiences of stigma, and eliminate unnecessary barriers that may otherwise deter patients from seeking care.

Equipment and Facilities

It is important that appropriate equipment is available to accommodate and accurately assess patients with high weight. This includes the following:

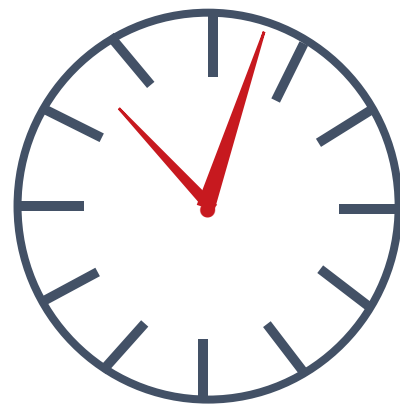
- Large, sturdy chairs and/or benches in waiting areas and examination rooms that can accommodate patients and visitors with large body sizes
- Sturdy step stools in examination rooms
- Large examination tables with proper width and weight capacity
- Extra-large examination gowns in every examination room
- Extra-large adult-sized blood pressure cuffs in every examination room
- High capacity scales that can support >500 lbs
- Extra long phlebotomy needles and tourniquets
- Floor-mounted toilets
- Sturdy grab bars in bathrooms
- Doors and hallways that accommodate large size wheelchairs, walkers, scooters

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Ensure the environment is welcoming and comfortable for patients of all body sizes



Try to set aside time for discussion, extending across visits if needed

