



PARENTS NEWS NOW

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When Parents Think Kids Are Overweight, It's More Likely They Will Be Later On

New research highlights the consequences of parents' perceptions of their kids' weight.

By Melissa Willets



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I know how big of a role my parents' words and actions regarding my weight over the years has played for me. It's something I try to be very conscious of as a mom of three girls, and now, a new

study validates that what parents think about the size of their children's waistlines truly has a lasting impact on them.

The research, which was published in [Psychological Science](#), a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, found that when parents thought their kids were overweight when they were young, they were more likely to grow up to fulfill that destiny.

"When a parent identifies a child as being overweight, that child is at increased risk of future weight gain," explains psychology researchers Eric Robinson from the University of Liverpool, and Angelina Sutin from Florida State University College of Medicine in their paper. "We argue that the stigma attached to being an overweight child may explain why children whose parents view them as being overweight tend to have elevated weight gain during development."

The researchers looked at two large groups of families; 2,823 in Australia and 5,886 in Ireland. First, they recorded kids' height and weight at age 4 or 5. Parents reported if they thought the kids were best described as underweight, normal weight, overweight, or very overweight.

When the kids reached age 12 or 13, they looked at images of bodies and picked out the one that most resembled their own. The kids also told researchers if they had tried to lose weight in the past year. Finally, the participants' weight and height was measured again at age 14 or 15.

Data showed that kids whose [parents thought they were overweight](#) at age 4 or 5 were more likely to gain weight 10 years later. Those kids were also more likely to have a poor self image and try to shed pounds. Researchers note that the link between parents' perceptions of their kids' bodies as young kids and subsequent weight gain was present even if the kids weren't actually overweight.

Obviously what we say and how we act as parents when it comes to our kids' bodies is hugely impactful. Here's hoping this research stays in the back of our minds as we [engage with our kids about their weight](#) now and in the future, with the goal of keeping our rhetoric and behavior positive, supportive, and healthy!

Melissa Willets is a writer/blogger and a mom. Find her on [Facebook](#) where she chronicles her life momming under the influence. Of coffee.