



THE FOUNDATION OF HEALTHY BODY IMAGE: IT'S A PARENT Coping with Stress

Most people have a great deal of stress in their lives. Today's killer diseases (heart disease, cancer, diabetes) are a direct result of poor ways of coping with stress (over-eating, smoking, drinking).

People seek comfort in food for many reasons. It's hard to resist turning to food for stress relief when it's easily accessible, inexpensive and provides immediate comfort. However, using food to cope too often can lead to weight-related stresses. For example, dieting creates the temporary illusion of being 'in control.' However, since most diets fail, they end up increasing stress. Feeling like a failure, we comfort our hurt with food. This cycle can damage our physical and mental well-being but the biggest problem is that our children are watching -- and taking notes!

Children who struggle with food problems have often observed a parent struggling with food issues. The best gifts you can give your child are to:

- Learn to handle your stress effectively.
- Acknowledge, address and resolve your own struggles with food issues so that you can model positive coping strategies.

Children need help from parents to learn healthy, effective ways to calm and soothe themselves.

- Ask your child about what makes them feel stress (rushing? homework? tests?).
- Talk about practical ways to reduce stress (planning ahead, being better organized, re-prioritizing, reducing commitments).
- Discuss favorite non-food-related ways of self-soothing (dancing, playing quietly, drawing, talking, snuggling).