

Center for BODY TRUST

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

We are so glad you are here.

We know you may be feeling a lot as you have been [reading this book](#). We imagine you may be feeling worry, guilt, shame and uncertainty about how to guide the children in your life towards Body Trust when everything you have been learning about kids, weight, health, fitness and nutrition is pointing you in a different direction.

We know that most of all, you want something different for the next generation than what you had growing up.. You don't want them to suffer in the ways you have and you want to protect them. We believe this is a wise guiding principle. We also want to encourage you to protect them **more** from misinformation and disordered eating than from becoming fat.

Kiese Laymon, author of *Heavy*, spoke this truth on social media: “Family can't talk about cycles of abuse, addiction or generational lies but we love to talk about the weight gain of the person not in the room. Trippin. Hard. Love doesn't look or act like this.”

Weight is a scapegoat, as Laymon suggests, and fat children are tortured in this culture because of it. They are tortured by other children who learn from their own parents, physicians, bullies, grandparents, strangers, school curriculums, popular television and media, and national nutrition campaigns that make fat kids the evidence of a problem. Fat kids are treated terribly and trying to make them not fat does even more harm. What caregivers may not know is that longitudinal research has found that “children whose parents used restrictive feeding have a higher likelihood of eating in the absence of hunger and an elevated BMI later in childhood” ([Tylka et. al, 2014](#)). Eating disorders are the most lethal mental health disorder secondary only to opiate dependency, and are difficult to heal from in a culture obsessed with thinness and health. There is no way to know how kids will be individually impacted by weight stigma and restrained feeding practices at home, but we know from our 22 years of clinical practice, that many eating disorders would have been prevented if food and weight were not talked about in such problematic ways in their childhood home. 20+ years of their lives that could have been about something else.

Our collective approach has to shift along with our fears. We are confident in saying that this isn't going well. One of the most difficult things to do, as a parent, is to source and give something to your children that you did not receive in your own upbringing. It can be gratifying but also very painful. Caring for children can be so triggering of our own traumas and raises our insecurities. As caregivers we manage a lot of fear and anxiety as we raise our children. Parents, in general, have been trying to protect their kids from weight stigma by making them

smaller, more than they have been lifting up and trusting in body diversity. Most of us adults have not had what we needed to heal our own relationship with food and our bodies. We also know the children in your life may be the ones bringing you to this conversation, to your own reckoning and reclamation. So, as much as we need compassion for our children's bodies and learning process, we need it just as much for our own. Please name and work on healing your own disordered eating. This is tough and necessary for ending cycles of harm in your lineage. To do this, adults are the ones that must claim their own food anxieties, fear, and shame and stay out of the way to raise children that have relationships with food that aren't rooted in fear or deprivation or the need to be right about it all.

Body Trust Provider Dawn Serra says she would like to tell her younger self: *"More than anything, I wish trusted adults in my life had embraced my hunger and taught me that my body is wise and worthy of being advocated for."*

When it comes to food, don't go after the "right" answer for your kids, go after the sustainable one that is steeped in trust that their relationship with food can be less conflicted than your own. Your child is truly developing a relationship with food. Just like the relationships we develop with other people, there are stages of trying, exploring, testing the boundaries, seeing what feels good and what doesn't and then, over time, moving into a more natural "known" rhythm. Your subtlest messages about food are powerful. If you communicate distrust of a food yourself or lean into simplifying food as good or bad, your child will notice and that food will gain power, whether it's considered "good" or "bad."

Letting your child explore food is an exercise in managing your own anxiety and parenting shame. In this world of body hierarchies, blame and shame, our kids need our kind and affirming eyes and words, and they need our advocacy. And everything is temporary, which is one of the best parenting mantras of all time. We can continually be asking ourselves, as Evelyn Tribole, author of Intuitive Eating suggests: What if we can end the legacy of diet culture at the kitchen table?

Boundaries are needed with loved ones and extended family. How about these? We don't talk about...

- food as "fattening" or "indulgent", etc.
- dieting or weight loss
- other people's bodies
- our own bodies negatively
- burning calories, exercise as weight control, being good

In the book *How to Raise an Intuitive Eater*, Sumner Brooks, MPH, RDN, CEDRD and Ameer Severson, MPP-D, RDN, offer Three Keys to raising the next generation with food and body confidence:

Key #1 Provide unconditional love and support for your child's body. This helps your child build a compassionate relationship with food and their body.

Key #2 Implement a Flexible and Reliable Eating Plan that provides adequate, familiar, tasty food that allows kids to trust their hunger and satiety.

Key #3 Develop and use your Intuitive Eating voice. The voice we use with our children becomes part of their inner voice. We can teach them to use a kind and trusting voice around their body and food.

Our children also need our advocacy to mitigate harm and stop a cycle that moves through families. Set boundaries with pediatricians about conversations about growth and weight. These conversations are best if they do not happen in front of children. (Check out Body Trust Provider Kristy Fassio's [letter to a pediatrician](#).) You can also be interrupting dominant culture as it shows up in the media in your home. Here are some examples of how you can address homogeneity or a lack of difference:

*I'm noticing all the people on this show are thin. Why do you think that is?
Weird, I've never been in a town where no one is LGTBQIA+. What's going on here?
I feel like this show is trying to tell us what is beautiful. What are you noticing?
Why are there no Black, Indigenous or People of Color? Why are POC never the lead, only the friend?
I feel sad and mad when people make fun of fat people. I wish that would never happen. It's so hurtful.*

We know, if you are new to this work, that this is a tall order. We also know this healing process is worth it. Kari V., Body Trust participant, shared this with us:

"Body Trust has fiercely impacted my commitment to stopping generations of eating disorders/body hatred passed through my family by radically transforming how I am raising my own children."

You don't have to do this perfectly to make a difference. If you are feeling overwhelmed or worried, here are a few bottom line ideas to keep in your back pocket:

1. Fed is best. Regularly and consistently. No matter what it is. Kids benefit from knowing when food is coming.
2. Around the time of puberty your kid's body is going to change a lot. One of these changes is weight gain, as much as 40 pounds. They may look fatter and rounder. Do not react or pathologize this. Don't let your doctor pathologize this. Trust their body. This is frequently where dieting and disordered eating begin.
3. Focus on raising kids who have a healthy relationship with food and eating, not "healthy" eaters.
4. [Find professionals](#) that are fat affirming and support your efforts to heal your relationship with food. Learn from them. It will take time. It's ok.

It can be scary and anxiety provoking, especially in a weight-obsessed culture, to do food differently in your home. Remember that we want our children to have experience and feel confident navigating food; we do not

want kids obsessing over doing it right. We can help steer our kids away from diet culture, size bias, and body blame. We want kids that feel free and connected to their bodies. We want the same for you.

In Body Trust,


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This letter was written for readers of our book, [Reclaiming Body Trust: A Path to Healing and Liberation](#). Here are some additional reading and resources:

- [Body Positive Picture Books](#)
- [How to Raise an Intuitive Eater](#)
- [A Kid's Book About Body Image](#)
- [9 Common Mistakes Parents Make About Their Kid's Weight](#)
- [What Happens When You Put a Kid On a Diet](#)
- [Leave Fat Kids Alone](#)