

PARENTING:
BARBARA BURROWS

Daughter needs to explore inner feelings

UNCOVER EMOTIONAL REASONS FOR OVEREATING

Dear Barbara:
I have two very attractive teenage twin girls and an overweight 12-year-old daughter. I recently read about the importance of exercise for obesity problems. There are no medical reasons for her condition. My daughter and I go for a walk every night but she drags her feet all the way. We do not have any goodies around in fact, the older girls sneak out after she is in bed for junk food. How else can a mother help?



Barbara Burrows

Dear Parent:
Some people can recognize when they are hungry and when they feel full and can eat accordingly. They can enjoy a good meal or snack, and truly feel satisfied when done. Eating can ease — momentarily, at least — unconscious emotional longings and dissatisfactions. Everyone enjoys comfort food occasionally, and eats not to satisfy hunger, but for pleasure. For some of us, the longings are so strong, the need for the comfort food reoccurs. The eating does gratify the emotional feelings somewhat, but the good

feeling is short-lived with compulsive eating. Depressed, guilty or disgusted feelings can follow. Even so, the wish to repeat the cycle is strong, and some people cannot easily stop eating to ease emotional tension. If your daughter is searching for a way to ease her emotional longings with food, keeping fattening foods away from her and encouraging her to exercise will not help her understand her problem. It may make her feel that you are depriving her, which could increase the emotional longing. Eating so much that she has become overweight probably makes her feel bad about herself.

This creates a negative cycle. Her negative feelings from poor self-control create deeper longings, which lead to more overeating. Instead of trying to help your daughter by controlling her eating and exercise habits, let her know people can have good reasons for eating too much of the wrong things that has to do with inner feelings. Encourage her to try to think about what kind of mood she is in when she wants to eat too much. Does she notice any inside thoughts and feelings when she wants to eat food that will make her gain weight? Especially point out that a girl's body changes tremendously at her age, and this can make her hate different things about it. Some girls feel such contempt for their bodies, or fear sexual thoughts and feelings that, unconsciously, they wish to make their bodies ugly. These hidden feelings can lead to the desire to eat too much. If she can recognize some of her inner longings, she may discover other more satisfying ways to solve these feelings.

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