

Webinar Will Begin Momentarily

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Professional Education Series

Support. Inform. Educate. Empower.

How to Cultivate a Family Culture of Health and Wellbeing

TODAY'S AGENDA:

- Introduction & Housekeeping
- Speaker Introduction
- Presentation
- Q&A
- Closing



WEBINAR HOST:

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Nationally-recognized childhood nutrition expert



“You are born into your family and your family is born into you.
No returns. No exchanges.”

~ Elizabeth Berg

Objectives & Disclosures

1. Appreciate and understand family culture as a contributor or detractor to the health and well-being of a child.
2. Use evidence-informed knowledge to overcome the promoters and detractors of family culture.
3. Counsel families to strengthen the family culture, including the areas of role modeling, body stigma, differential treatment, and family functioning.

*The content is based on my upcoming book, *Kids Thrive at Every Size* (Workman 2024).



The leading concern
for today's parents:

Is my child safe,
healthy, and happy?

REF: One Poll, 2018





27% of U.S. children and teens have a chronic health condition.

Type 2 diabetes: 13.8/100K youth/year and this increases as children age.

- 41.6 K new cases worldwide, mostly in China, India, and U.S.

Hypertension: 1 in 25 youth, aged 12 -19

14.5 million kids are medically classified as “overweight” or “obese.”

Roughly 2 million children between 2 and 13 years are “underweight.”

REF: Childhood Obesity Facts | Overweight & Obesity | CDC. (2021, November 12).



Emotional Well-being is Worse

Pre- versus Post-Pandemic

- 7% of children and teens are diagnosed with anxiety
- 3% have diagnosed depression
- Global increase in mental health concerns
- Generalized anxiety at 20%
- Depression rising to 25% for children aged 13 years.
- More hospitalizations for eating disorders in children and teens.

How Kids Feel About Bodies

- Body dissatisfaction in children as young as 3
- Wish for thinness in children as young as 6
- Half of middle-school girls and a third of boys want to be thinner
- 75% of teen boys are unhappy with their bodies (bigorexia)

Disturbed relationship with food, body and self may lead to disordered eating, body dysmorphia, and eating disorders.

REF: Body Confidence Issues, 2016; Dion et al., 2016; Nagata et al., 2019



The Topic is Tricky

More than 30% of parents avoid talking with their children about their health and size due to fears of harming their self-esteem or causing an eating disorder.

This doubles for parents who've identified their child as being in a larger body.




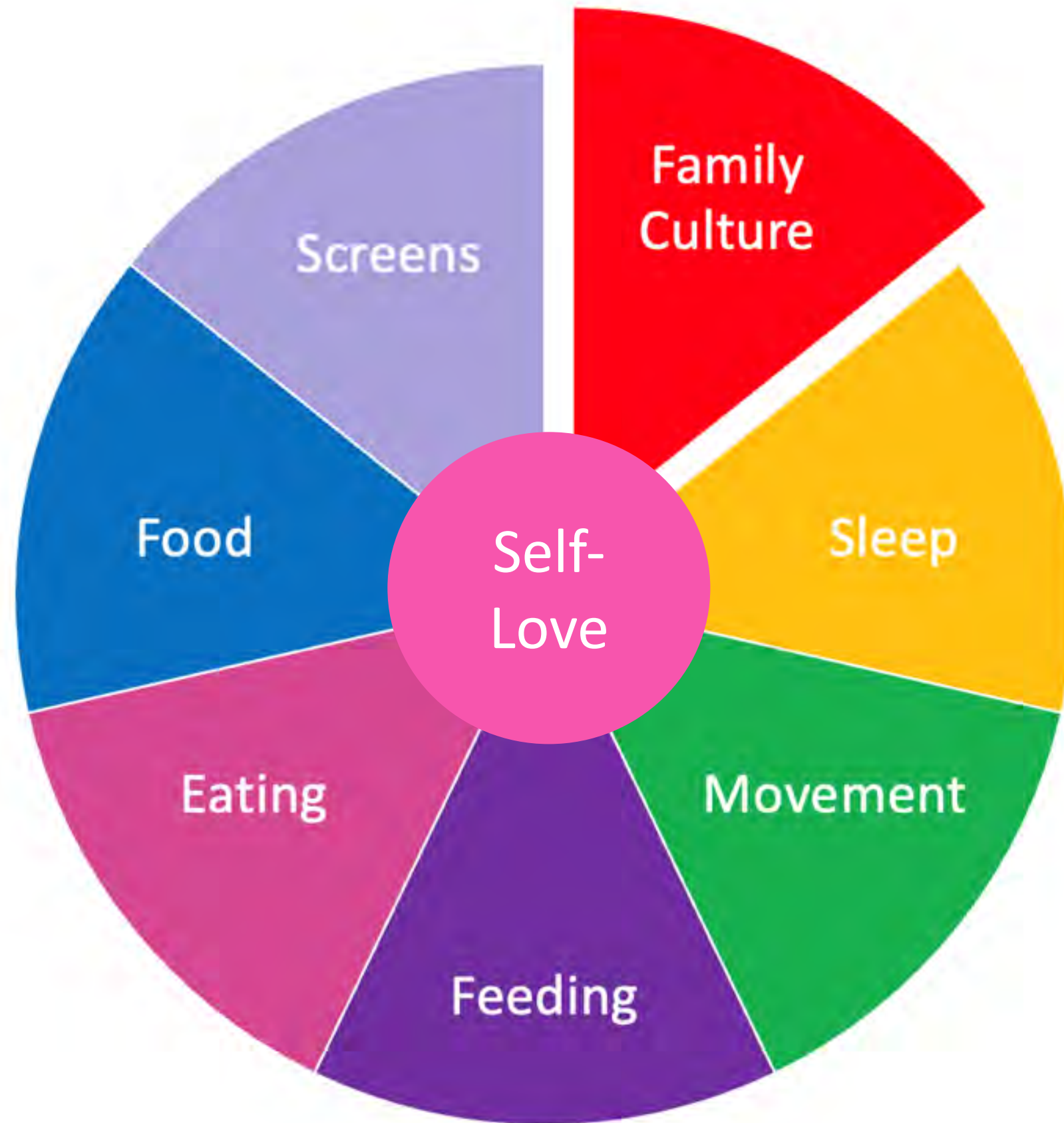




We need to address
both physical health
and emotional
wellbeing at the
same time...

Whole Child Healthy

- *Every* body is a growing, good body, no matter its size or shape.
 - All foods can be enjoyed in a balanced, nutritious diet.
 - Enjoyment is celebrated on all levels, including eating, movement, and family connection, and is a key to physical and emotional health.
 - Intuition, mindfulness and autonomy are learned skills in childhood which support overall health and the development of healthful behaviors.
 - From role models to gatekeepers, parents are key influencers and should be fully empowered to feed and lead their children to health.
 - Children are respected, engaged, and protected on all levels.
- 



The 8 Pillars of Wellness



Pillar #1: Family Culture

Family culture is the most influential “culture” a child will experience in childhood.

What is Family Culture?

The set of values, practices, ideas, and attitudes of the family.

- traditions and rituals at holidays or religious events
- daily gatherings at mealtime, sports, or community activities
- the family belief system, like the responsibility to give back to the community

Family culture is woven into the fabric of daily living and lifestyle behaviors.

Family culture is who *the family is as a family.*





Family culture sets the framework for how children *feel about themselves* and how the family interacts and functions.





A Strong, Supportive Family Culture

A strong family culture and bond was a *cornerstone to thriving and succeeding in life.*

Acceptance and nurturance strongly influence the family bond and includes:

- care
- support
- safety
- respect
- participation



What does it take to flourish in childhood?

It depends on:

- Self-acceptance
- Purpose in life
- Positive relations with others
- Personal growth
- Mastery in the environment
- Autonomy

Children who had the *greatest family connectedness* were almost **50% more likely** to flourish!



When a family is connected,
children can thrive, rather
than simply survive.

A Strong Family Culture



- Reduces damage that may arise from societal norms, peer pressure, stigma, bias, and exclusion.
- Softens the impact of *discrimination* but isn't enough to buffer its negative influence.
- When a *negative family dynamic* exists, the impact of discrimination is worse.

What Weakens Family Culture?

- **Unequal treatment**
- **Size bias and stigma within the family**
- **Parental self-criticism**
- **Size bias from others**
- **Weight stigma by association**



Unequal Treatment within the Family

Singling out a child from the rest of the family; having different rules for children within a family

"I have to watch my larger child like a hawk while my other child needs constant reminders to eat."

Examples:

- Restricting second helpings for the child with a larger body or who is more food-focused
- Pushing the smaller child to eat more
- Getting the child with a larger body to move more
- Allowing more "treats" for the smaller child

Reality: Unequal treatment within the family unit **harms family connection, and may be stigmatizing**, undermining a child's self-worth.



Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is a belief or attitude of which we are *unaware and unconscious*.

It develops early and is shaped by our home environment, the media, and the outside world.

For instance, you may believe that every child can be healthy at every size, but you may discourage sweets and treats when a child presents in a larger body to your clinic.

Project Implicit (Harvard University)

Implicit Associations Test: Weight Bias

<https://www.obesitycompetencies.gwu.edu/article/388>



Size Bias

Stereotypes and negative beliefs associated with a child's size.



Size stigma

Discriminatory acts such as teasing, bullying, cyber-bullying, name-calling, physical aggression, and emotional manipulation toward a child because of their size.

Size Stigma from Family



- Teasing or bullying from parents due to the size or weight of a child.
- Siblings who hit, name call (“picky,” “lazy,” “fat”), or tease based on a sibling’s size or body weight.

A child who experiences body shaming from their family members is likely to incur poor self-esteem and mistrust of the family.

- Thirty-seven percent of teenagers who attended weight loss camps reported weight-based teasing at home.
- Family members were reported to be the *most significant source* of size stigma, with 53% reporting stigma from their mothers, and 44% reporting it from their fathers.



Parental Self-Criticism

“I ate that donut. I’m so bad.”

- Parent dieting, and especially talking about food and weight with children may lead to negative eating behaviors in the child.
- Adults who experienced their own parents dieting, participating in ‘fat talk,’ or informal conversations displaying body dissatisfaction, or whose mothers encouraged them to diet or criticized their bodies reported a significantly higher BMI later in life.
- Fathers may have the same impact, but mothers seem to have more, especially on their daughters.



Size Bias from Other Parents

Parents of children with mid-sized bodies (or who appear to be at a “healthy weight”) demonstrate size bias against children with larger bodies.

#TRUTH:

If parents are biased against differently-sized children, it's fair to expect this will pass on to their own children and perpetuate size stigma and discrimination.



Size stigma in children may lead to adverse health outcomes:

- Dysfunctional eating patterns (binge eating)
- Social isolation and depression
- Poor self-esteem and body image
- Reduced physical activity
- Worsening of health
- Substance abuse (in teens), and
- Weight gain, and weight fluctuations

REF: Pont et al., 2017; Puhl et al, 2020

Children who
experience
size-related
teasing have a
lower quality of life.

REF: Pont et al, 2017 | Guardabassi, 2018



Stigma by Association

The diminishment of a person because they're connected to someone with a stigmatized condition or identity.

- Family members are a common source of negative comments, often about parenting skills.
- Negative experiences in the doctor's office because of a child's size. (One study indicated that 69% of pediatricians report that "parents are to blame" for a child's size and the conditions associated with it.)
- All mothers expressed guilt and sadness about their role in their child's size, wishing they had parented differently.

Mothers experience lower self-esteem, stress, and psychological distress which negatively affects their personal and family relationships and may also cause them to develop a negative view of their child.



How to Help Families Cultivate a Strong FAMILY CULTURE

Role Model

**Body Neutral
Home**

**Family
Functioning**

**Acceptance
& Inclusion**



A Body Neutral Home

Body Negativity: A negative view (deficits, imperfections) of the body

Body Positivity: appreciative view of the body regardless of shape, size or other appearance factor

Body Neutral: no focus on appearance, but rather on function

A Body Neutral Home Focuses on...

- Signature Strengths
- Neutral or Positive Body Talk
- Body Function over Form



Body Talk

Body Positivity vs Body Neutrality

BoPo: “You’re so pretty.” “Your body is beautiful just as it is.”

Reality: While positive, the focus is on appearance.

BoNeut: “Your legs are strong.” (external); or “You’re a loyal friend.” (internal)

Reality: Neutralizes the social value of appearance and focuses on function or internal qualities



Signature Strengths

Focus on character, inner qualities, and cultivating a sense of body appreciation.

Name them!

Funny, loyal, a quick-wit, empathetic, sensitive, practical, a good writer, a natural at math, diplomatic, athletic, graceful, a good student, or a true friend.



Function over Form

- What the body can do rather than what it looks like
- Functional health rather than fear-mongering about future health
- Size acceptance rather than meeting societal norms

What You Can Do

- Assess for size bias in the home and outside
- Teach about diet culture
- Promote neutral body talk
- Emphasize functional health, not appearance, size or weight



Power of the Role Model



Role modeling, or the attitudes, norms, and beliefs that are absorbed by children simply by watching what a parent does and how they think and react.

A Good Role Model Demonstrates...

- Leadership in Health Behaviors and Attitudes
- Enjoyment of Eating
- Spectrum Thinking (vs. Binary Thinking)

Health Behaviors

Parents with healthful lifestyle behaviors have children who are 10 times more likely to eat the recommended servings of fruits and veggies, are more active, and 3.7 times more likely to be free of health conditions.

What a parent eats is **less important** than their efforts to model what healthy eating looks like.



Enjoyment of Eating

Parents who frequently **eat and demonstrate enjoyment** influence their children in positive ways.

As children grow up and become smarter, **explicit modeling of positive, healthful eating behaviors and food enjoyment** from their parents shape their eating behaviors.





Photo cred: Eurobesity.org

Spectrum Thinking

Spectrum thinking considers multiple options, alternatives, and possibilities.

Examples: *Good food/bad food (binary) vs. All foods can fit (spectrum)*

Healthy/unhealthy vs. food that energizes, satisfies the appetite, etc

Use spectrum thinking to help children learn and develop an open, non-biased attitude



What You Can Do

Teach:

Key health behaviors for role modeling

Emphasize enjoyment in all things

Challenge binary thinking



Acceptance, Inclusion, and Dignity

Advocate for all bodies!

- Togetherness reinforces inclusion and acceptance
- All for One, One for All – treat everybody the same
- Body Dignity: the expectation of respect and care for all bodies





What You Can Do:

Teach and model respectful body descriptors and language

Encourage awareness and be a voice against diet culture

Promote parental self-compassion

Family Functioning

- Family manifesto: the mission and vision
- Family Meetings
- Family Meals

A family that functions well together builds a strong culture that supports and protects the child.



Family Manifesto

A declaration of policy and aims;
'who we are and what we believe'; a family creed

- Provides grounding and a unifying point for all family members
- Summarizes a mission and vision
 - Health values
 - Core beliefs
 - How family members should treat each other



In Our House We...

Believe all bodies are good bodies.

Appreciate everything our bodies can do.

Understand that differences are what makes people unique and interesting.

Respect everyone, no matter their age, gender, color, creed, or size.

Are a team – we help each other, we support each other, and we champion
each other.

Family Meals

- Most influential on children's dietary habits simply through **the interactions between parents and their children** around the table.
- A **healthy family environment around food**, including frequent family meals, a positive mealtime vibe, and avoiding "body and eating talk" at the table is protective against disordered eating and eating disorders.



Table Talk



Conversations about food, eating behaviors, and health at the meal table can sensitize a child in two ways: by **alerting their inadequacies** (making them feel bad) or by **turning them off** (demotivating them).



What You Can Do

- Help families prioritize their mission/vision for "family"
- Encourage positive family meals
- Emphasize non-stigmatizing language
- Ideate family activities



The Goal of Family Culture

Create a culture of **acceptance and inclusivity** (at every size) within the family while engaging in health-promoting behaviors **together**.

*What I Want
for You Is...*



Because...



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