

Positive Communication About Obesity

The aim of these guidelines is to support parliamentarians and policymakers to communicate and work in a non-stigmatising manner relating to body weight or size.

How to communicate effectively and positively

1. When discussing weight, use non-judgemental, easily understood terminology. For example, use the neutral terms 'weight', 'excess weight' and for consistency with healthcare, use scientific descriptive terms, i.e. Body Mass Index descriptors.
2. Use person first language (i.e., put people before a characteristic). For instance, rather than using "obese people like to...", use "people with obesity like to...".
3. Work with people with obesity when developing policy, campaigns or interventions.
4. Use non-stigmatising images, photographs or video clips in public policy, campaigns and social media posts.
5. Communicate accurate, evidence-based information about weight, such as its causes and consequences. Try to be accurate when referring to a person's BMI.
6. Recognise the complexity of obesity.
7. Where possible, take opportunities to promote weight equality and take the opportunity to condemn weight stigma attitudes and discriminatory behaviour.
8. Recognise that there is an array of options that people might choose to reduce their weight, and where weight loss is desired, that no one form of method is appropriate for all.

What to avoid?

1. Using humour or ridicule. This includes in interviews or other public facing activities.
2. Suggestions that a person's body weight implies negative assumptions about their character, intelligence, abilities, etc. where possible, try not to refer to people with obesity as patients.
3. Stereotyping people based on body weight (e.g., laziness, gluttony, lacking intelligence). Alternatives include portraying people with obesity with expertise, authority and intelligence.
4. Try to avoid using terms such as 'obesity' or 'overweight' as adjectives.
5. Implying that all people with overweight and obesity have a desire to lose weight.
6. Combative language when referring to efforts to reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity. For instance, try to avoid saying 'the war on obesity' and 'fight against obesity'. This can lead to frustration, anger and defensiveness.
7. Blaming individuals, families and groups, or implying that a particular population group does not wish to manage their weight. Try to support individuals rather than giving blame.

Greater detail and supporting resources are detailed in the full parliamentary guidelines. These can be found at www.obesityappg.com.