



# Fat And Happy Not Acceptable

Sometimes it is necessary to talk about uncomfortable topics to fix a problem. That is what happened in Hartford last Friday when 300 people gathered to talk about the problem of overweight kids.

The obesity rate for children aged 6 to 11 has tripled in the United States over the last two decades. That is unacceptable. The health of children in America should be improving, not declining. But too much television and computer time, too much junk food and too big portions, and too little exercise, are all taking a toll on America's youngest citizens.

Overweight kids typically grow into overweight adults. And children who are too heavy are at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem.

As they age, most of them don't lose the extra weight, they put on more instead. And obese adults are more at risk than normal-weight adults for health problems like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer and osteoarthritis.

Who wants to set their children up for that? Parents are better off to set good examples about healthy nutrition and regular exercise - serving balanced meals and making sports, walks and bicycling or swimming part of the family routine.

The idea at last week's forum was to provide strategies to combat the growing childhood obesity epidemic and give town officials, community leaders and families concrete suggestions to help overweight children slim down and possibly prevent new cases of young obesity.

Success is not tied to a complex formula. It is a simple solution that requires commitment and will power. Kids get fat when they consume more calories than they burn. They need to learn to put down the fork and climb on their bicycles instead. Adults must lead by example.

Friday's gathering was a good start. Hosted by the state Department of Public Health and the Commission on Children, in collaboration with the Connecticut Childhood Obesity Council, it was a place for people to talk about a serious problem.

And the more that people talk about obese kids, and how to help them shed pounds and live healthier lives, the better chance that those youngsters will grow up to be healthy adults. That is a discussion worth having.