



Weight loss

Explore Health and Fitness

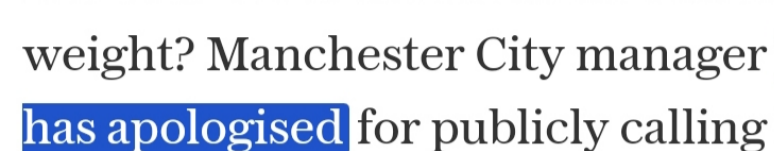


How to tell someone you love they're fat – without hurting their feelings

It's such a sensitive topic, so how can we talk to someone about their weight without 'fat-shaming' them?

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Is it ever OK to tell someone that they need to lose weight? Manchester City manager [Pep Guardiola has apologised](#) for publicly calling Calvin Phillips overweight when he returned from the [World Cup](#) in 2022. Was he right to call him out or is fat-shaming always the wrong way to get someone to look after their health?

It can be difficult when we only want the best for someone we care about but notice that their eating habits could easily lead to health problems. More than 25 per cent of UK adults are [obese](#). With all the negative health implications that come with putting on weight – from diabetes to high blood pressure – how do you talk to someone you love who is dangerously overweight? Or perhaps has unhealthy habits, such as smoking or [binge drinking](#), but who seemingly won't address the issue? We spoke to the experts.

Choose the right time and place

"This is a delicate conversation," says Amy Carroll, a communication coach. "Don't assume that just by saying, 'Hey, I'm concerned about your weight', that you're being helpful. It's arrogant to think that people who are overweight have not spent considerable time thinking about how they can stop being overweight," she says.

"It won't be easy to have this conversation, so choose your moment," Carroll advises. "Maybe take a quiet walk together so you can start a discussion side by side rather than it feeling confrontational."

Don't say: 'You should go on a diet'

In fact, Carroll says to forget giving advice altogether. "Start with a non-judgmental observation and ask a question. Say: 'I notice that the last couple of times I've seen you, you've been talking negatively about how you look and feel. I wanted to ask – how are you feeling?'" Then just listen. Don't offer advice, instead ask questions and be empathetic.

"If you come across as judgmental, your loved one might think you are being unkind and won't want to confide in you," says Carroll.

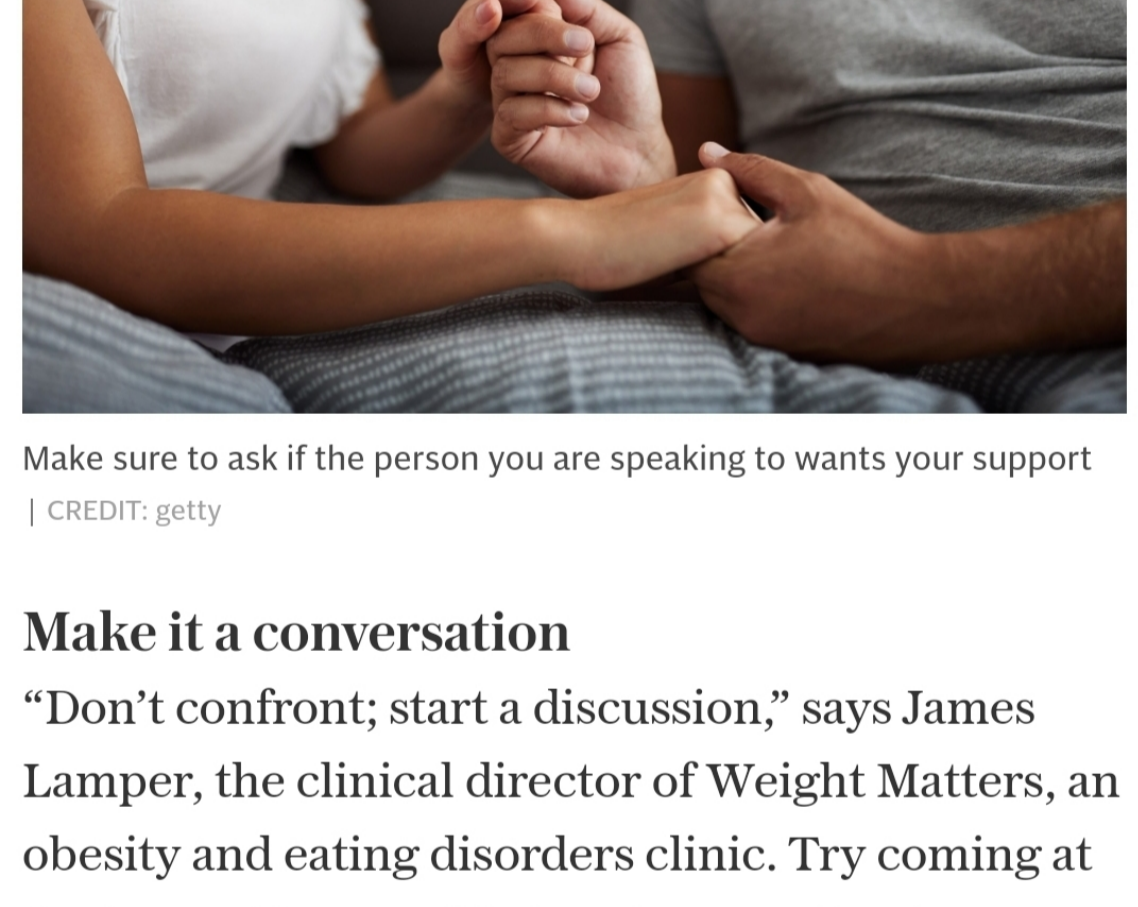
Do say: 'I love and care about you'

Start the conversation by voicing your concern and saying something like: "I'm worried I'm going to say something wrong and it will upset you. Are you open to having a conversation about topic X?"

If they say no, don't try to persuade or convince them, just tell them you are there if they change their mind.

If they say yes, state your anxieties: "I love and care about you and I'm scared and concerned about X (your weight/ drinking/smoking). Your physical and emotional health are important to me and I'm worried. Can you tell me how you feel about it?"

Then stop talking and listen, says Carroll. "Your loved one might react, rant, cry. Let them talk. Do give them lots of empathy. Don't give them suggestions or advice on what to do. Do ask if they want your support and if so, ask what that support would look like," she says.



Make sure to ask if the person you are speaking to wants your support

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Make it a conversation

"Don't confront; start a discussion," says James Lamper, the clinical director of Weight Matters, an obesity and eating disorders clinic. Try coming at the issue sideways. "Rather than confront your daughter about the 10 chocolate wrappers you found in the drawer, open up a discussion about a celebrity who has an [eating disorder](#) or a friend who might be struggling," says Lamper. "Talking about eating issues in general can normalise them, and might help your loved one to talk about what they are going through," he says. It can also be a way to share documentaries or books that might help them.

'Don't focus on the food, focus on the feeling'

Addictive behaviours, Lamper explains, which include addiction to food, start in childhood. "Food may be the first thing we reach for to escape feelings that make us feel isolated, different and bad – and this may become a habitual response."

This behaviour may progress to alcohol or drugs as children become teenagers. So, rather than talking about food, cigarettes or alcohol, start a discussion about how we navigate negative feelings. "Starting deeper conversations can open the way to explore feelings that stem from childhood, and this is where the healing begins," says Lamper.

Discover if there are gaps in nutrition knowledge

Your [children](#) might not know enough about nutrition, or eat junk food because it's fun and tasty. "Don't start lecturing your kids about nutrition though," says Carroll. Again, she suggests asking permission. "Would you be open to me asking you some questions about what you're eating? Would you be open to us talking about this, because from what you've said in the past, this has been a struggle for you and it's still worrying you?"

"When someone is eating to a level of obesity, it's more than likely an emotional issue versus not knowing what's healthy," says Carroll. "Ask questions to ascertain what's going on, listen and reflect back and ask what kind of support they need," she advises.

Be open about your own struggles

Showing your own vulnerability invites connection, says Lamper. "When you're able to show your own vulnerability in a relationship, it invites the other person to be vulnerable themselves because you're indicating it's OK to share," he says. Say things like: "I noticed I've started to stress eat because my job is getting me down." Or, "When my dad died, I started drowning my sorrows." Be open and honest about yourself.