



Photo courtesy of Nationwide Children's Hospital

Lauren and her family work together to make healthy choices and support one another.

Success starts with personal motivation, family support

Bright-eyed teenager Lauren admits she and her father, William, used to argue over her poor health habits. As any concerned parent would, Lauren's dad tried to broach the subject and had little success.

"I got frustrated with him. It made me not want to do anything about it," Lauren said.

Although William wanted what was best for his daughter, directly approaching a child about bad habits may do more harm than good.

"One of the least successful ways to approach your child about a healthier lifestyle or the possible need to lose weight is to point it out to them without having a plan," said Kevin Smith, pediatric psychologist with The Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

Instead, Smith recommends scheduling a wellness visit with your child's pediatrician. "When possible, parents should be removed as the main messenger in these situations," Smith said.

Get the facts on your child's body-mass index (BMI) and growth-chart information at the pediatrician's office. That way there's no guessing about your child's health and no hurt feelings.

If the pediatrician's conclusion is that your child should begin adopting healthier habits, know that your child may come to you seeking help.

"If your child comes to you, don't be afraid to pursue it," Smith said. "First, ask for your child's ideas and provide ways to support them. For example, if they want to eat healthier snacks, plan a shopping list and include them on the next grocery store trip." Don't be afraid to ask for help. Smith

said dieticians and therapeutic-recreation specialists provide additional information to help families get on the right track.

If your child still is disinterested in changing their habits after the pediatrician visit, Smith advises against pushing them.

"It is very difficult to make changes if you are not ready or motivated," Smith said. "What you can do is make environmental changes: buy nutritious snacks, serve healthier meals and suggest walks after dinner. It's important that you implement changes that the whole family can adapt to. Sometimes it's just not the right time. When they want to come around, they will."

Not surprisingly, Lauren eventually came around to the idea of a healthier lifestyle — all on her own. Lauren joined the program at Nationwide Children's Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition with the support of her father, and Lauren's whole family is involved in the program now.

"We got a family membership to the gym," said Lauren's mom, Regina. "We go there together at least once on the weekend. We also go for bike rides and cut back on fast food and snacking. It's really helped us all."

Lauren's family is on the right track to success.

"The finger should never be pointed at a child as if to say, 'This is your problem, not mine.' It should be a family effort. Show the child that they have your support and that you are in it together," Smith said.

Experts from the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital provided the information for this column.