

Helping Someone Make That Weight Loss Resolution Work

from the American Counseling Association

Yes, losing weight is always the number one New Year's Resolution. But were you aware that family and friends can play a significant role in helping someone achieve his or her weight loss goal? And now, when most resolutions are already falling by the wayside, is a great time to help someone trying to trim that waistline.

One way to help is by avoiding the negative things we often think are helpful. Acting like the food police is one of the most common, especially if that includes depriving the person of their favorite foods. You can also hurt someone's efforts by what you say. Constantly talking about new diets, citing the health risks of being overweight, or telling someone that losing weight is easy and just a matter of willpower may seem "helpful" but actually hurt the person's effort. Such talk can reinforce the person's negative feelings and make clear that you think something is wrong with him or her unless that weight loss happens.

So what are positive, constructive ways to help? One way is to offer ongoing, positive encouragement, not about the weight loss, but about the person in general. Negative feelings that trigger eating are often tied to low self-esteem and being unhappy with one's appearance and life. Substituting honest, positive messages about the person's actions, personality and appearance can be really motivating.

It can also help to encourage the person to express feelings, especially negative ones, that may be leading to overeating. Often a weight problem is actually a symptom of a different problem in the person's life. It may be relationship issues, a bad work situation or troubling family matters that are causing stress and stress-related eating. Helping identify stress sources can minimize the need to feel better by reaching for food.

You can also help by being a positive role model. That doesn't mean having to diet yourself, but simply setting a positive example, without lecturing, by eating healthy and making sensible food and portion size choices. Starting or continuing an exercise program and inviting the person trying to lose weight can also help.

Losing weight is never easy, especially when there are problems and stresses that helped trigger the weight gain. But being someone who truly understands the problem and is willing to listen and help, rather than lecture about weight, can go a long way in promoting weight loss success.

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