

Analysis of: Parenting Styles and Treatment of Adolescents with Obesity by Susann Reger, Kristina Berg-Kelly and Steffan Mårild

This article begins by describing the worldwide problem of childhood obesity. A recent estimate says there are nearly 140,000 children between 10 and 16 years of age that are overweight or obese in 34 countries (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 1). When we discussed the subject of adolescent obesity in class we talked about a few reasons why this number has reached epidemic proportions recently; they include but are not limited to, lower prices for high fat and low nutritional foods, less physical activity and a lower socioeconomic status. According to the article “Parenting styles and treatment of Adolescents with Obesity” the three main factors that contribute to obesity are biological, behavioral and environmental (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 2). Understanding that being overweight and obese is linked to all three of these factors helps medical professionals help their patients overcome their weight problem.

Some of the physical health consequences of obesity that begin to develop in adolescence are hypertension (high blood pressure), type 2 diabetes, gall bladder disease, and musculoskeletal disorders (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 6). The effects are not only physical but also emotional. Many adolescents who are overweight suffer from poor self-esteem, poor body image, loneliness, sadness, nervousness, and stigmatization (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 5). Many of these consequences are long lasting and very difficult to overcome. “The social and economic consequences of obesity in adolescence are greater than those of many chronic physical disorders” explained Reger, Berg-Kelly, and Mårild. A study from 1981 to 1988 found that

adults who were obese as adolescents had lower household incomes, completed fewer years of school, had lower self esteem and married less often.

The article described some of the programs in place to help children overcome obesity. All of the methods described were based on heavy parental involvement. Children will have a very difficult time losing weight if their parents and families are still practicing bad habits that lead to weight gain. In our class discussion we concluded that parental involvement would greatly improve the child's success rate in losing weight, and this article affirms this finding.

As part of the program outline, the article focuses on helping parents learn what type of parent they are, whether they are authoritarian, permissive, authoritative or indifferent. Authoritarian parents are very goal oriented, and set mandatory rules for their children. These types of parents are very demanding and there is not room for failure. Many children have self esteem issues when they have authoritarian parents. Permissive parents are nearly opposite of an authoritarian parent. They are tolerant, with very few rules and regulations. Parents who are permissive do not like conflict and will avoid it as long as possible. Children with permissive parents tend to be aggressive, impulsive, and lack independence, and also lack a sense of responsibility (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 24). Authoritative parents are characterized by a warm involvement, but firm and consistent rules and limits. They also have a democratic style to their parenting with a give and take relationship with setting rules and punishments. Children raised in authoritative homes tend to be self-confident, independent, and responsible (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 23). Indifferent parents are marked by a cold and uninterested approach to their children. They try to minimize time and interaction with their child. Children who have indifferent parents are likely to be neglected. They may also lack emotional control and long-term goals, and often are involved in delinquent activities (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 25).

The article concludes with a few case illustrations of the different parenting styles and how each one should respond to an overweight child. They are interesting and it is very helpful to place yourself in the described situations. The first example is a permissive parenting style. It explains how a child that is used to getting their own way may have a hard time reacting to a parent who suddenly changes to an authoritative or authoritarian style. It also helps parents overcome the pitfalls of being permissive and helps them take control to help their children overcome obesity.

The next example shows an overweight boy who has joined a basketball club with an authoritative parent. It discusses how the boy is embarrassed and has come to unforeseen obstacles with the basketball including wanting to quit because he gets tired easily and is prone to excessive sweating. The authoritative parent gives options and is there to help the child succeed. An authoritative approach seems to have the best outcomes and all parties involved gain the end result they want to have (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 27-30).

The final example that will be discussed here is an authoritarian parenting style. The example is of a young boy who plays video games every day after school. He drinks high calorie, high sugar content soft drinks. The article makes a very interesting point, which is the necessity of being flexible in your parenting styles (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 44). It says that although generally it seems best to have a give and take relationship sometimes it is best to make strict rules. For example in the example a good rule may be no eating or drinking while playing video games or, limiting the amount of time the child is allowed to play video games per day. These types of strict rules will encourage children to do other activities and replace some bad habits with good ones (Reger, Berg-Kelly, Mårild 44).

Although I don't have children yet I can see that the problem of obesity is not going to go away on its own. I will have to make a concentrated effort to prevent my children from suffering from childhood obesity. With the rapid technological advances it will be constantly easier to just sit in front of the computer or TV. By reading this article I have learned ways to help children overcome issues, whether it is obesity or deviant behavior, through the different parenting styles and roles. The success of overcoming childhood obesity and its effects lies in the hands of the parents.