

The DIPEX Charity, PO Box 428, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 9EU
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Children speak up to highlight the hidden fears of weight

Online videos throw a lifeline to others

Interviews with 36 young people today go online to highlight the fear, isolation and confusion facing some children with weight issues.

The latest section on the website www.youthhealthtalk.org about health and weight, is based on hundreds of video clips and animations about the experiences of the 36, aged from 12 upwards. Their stories, in video and text, throw a lifeline to tens of thousands of others who also face mental and physical health problems.

The group, who have diverse experience of weight problems, reveal their innermost thoughts about being overweight, anorexic, dieting, bullying, and relationships. While some are comfortable with their weight, others feel misunderstood, even by their GP.

The interviews form part of high quality research by the Health Experiences Research Group at the University of Oxford. 'I was struck by how openly young people talked about their experiences. They wanted to help others by conveying that change is possible and how they have benefited from losing weight,' said Dr Maria Salinas, senior researcher.

The site also provides parents and healthcare professionals with an insight into an often hidden world. It reveals that overweight or obese young people often experience verbal and in some cases physical abuse by their peers. In many cases this has led to self-imposed isolation as a form of self protection.

Many young people interviewed were aware that being overweight was not good for their health and were trying hard to tackle their weight through healthy eating and exercise.

But few young people had been given any detailed advice about exactly what they needed to do to help them lose weight and get fit. And when parents raised the topic with GPs, they were sometimes told not to worry and that their child would grow out of their 'puppy fat'.

One answer to weight loss lies in community-based weight management programmes, such as the SHINE initiative, in Sheffield, several of whose members speak out on www.youthhealthtalk.org.

In this scheme, young people take part in activities with a group, get out of the house, learn about a healthy diet, become more active, make friends and learn how to deal with bullying and other difficult social situations. Support from the project has helped some to build their confidence and self-esteem as well as helping with weight and body image.

The DIPEX Charity

DIPEX is a registered charity No: 1087019 and company limited by guarantee No. 4178865
Registered office: 41 Cornmarket Street, Oxford OX1 3HA
Co-Founders: Dr Ann McPherson CBE and Dr Andrew Herxheimer
Trustees: Lord Stone of Blackheath (Chair), Lord Turnberg, Catherine Dilnot,
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Support from family and friends is also crucial in achieving a healthier lifestyle and reaching target weight. Several had found it helpful when other family members really supported them - eating the same sorts of food and taking exercise with them.

‘These young people have shown vividly the importance of self esteem and self confidence in weight issues – as well as advice on diet and physical exercise’ said the website’s founder, GP, Dr Ann McPherson. ‘With one in three 10 and 11 year olds either overweight or obese, we need to pay attention to what these young contributors to the site are saying.’

Kath Sharman, director of SHINE, said: “Reassurance and advice for young people – and their parents – is now just a few mouse-clicks away, thanks to www.youthhealthtalk.org. This site will provide a much needed resource for everyone.”

For more information, interviews and case studies, contact:

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Notes to editors:

The website, www.youthhealthtalk.org, is a sister site to www.healthtalkonline.org whose patron is Hugh Grant.

www.youthhealthtalk.org contains young people’s experiences of 7 different illnesses and health conditions and more are in progress (including experiences of drugs and alcohol). The websites are aimed at children and patients, their carers, family and friends, doctors, nurses and other health professionals, and are based on in-depth qualitative research carried out by the Health Experiences Research Group at the University of Oxford.

DIPEX which creates the website, a registered charity no. 1087019, is funded by the Department of Health and charitable trusts. Full details are on our websites.

SHINE (Self Help Independence, Nutrition and Exercise - www.shine4u.org) aims to help obese young people, not only to lose weight, but also to develop a range of skills to increase in confidence and self esteem. This enables young people to make more permanent changes to their lifestyles and to become a healthier and fitter person, both physically and mentally.

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