Background

- Family-based behavior change is essential in the treatment of obesity in children and adolescents.
- Modifications are recommended for children with special needs to assist in having success with healthy lifestyle changes (Ityi et al. 2012).
- When assisting families with implementing healthy changes, assessment of readiness and confidence is a crucial first step.
- Research has demonstrated that confidence levels for parents of children with special needs tend to be lower than those of typically developing children (Dreyer Gillette et al., 2012).

Objective: Is parent confidence to make healthy lifestyle changes related to child body mass index (BMI z-score) change?

Methods

- Inclusion Criteria: All participants attended the Special Needs Weight Management Clinic. Patient eligibility included a primary special need diagnosis (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, physical disability, other developmental disabilities), obesity (Body Mass Index (BMI) > or =95th percentile), age between 2 and 18 years, and speaking English or Spanish.

Measures:

- Pre-Clinic Questionnaire: Parents or caregivers completed the questionnaire prior to their first clinic appointment. Questions were answered using a 10-point Likert scale. The following questions were used for this analysis:
  - "How important is it to you to make changes to the way you and your family eat?"
  - "How important is it to you to increase your family’s physical activity?"
  - "How able do you believe you and your family are to make these changes in the next 6 months?"
- Child Anthropometrics: Child height and weight were measured using standardized procedures at baseline and at a 6-month follow-up.
- Demographics: Child diagnosis, age, gender, and insurance status were abstracted from the medical record.
- Data Analysis Plan: Data were analyzed using means and correlations.

Participants:

- 57 Parent/guardians
- Mean Age (of patients) 9.58
- Mean BMI/Percentiles: 30.74/96.68%/2.49
- Female: 32% Male: 68% African American: 14% Latino/a: 14% Caucasian: 67% Other 5.3%

Results

- Diagnoses Treated
  - Autism: 54.40%
  - Down Syndrome: 17.50%
  - Unspecified Developmental Delay: 15.80%
  - Cerebral Palsy: 5.30%
  - Prader Willi: 3.50%
  - MR/Intellectual Disability: 3.50%

- Importance to Make Changes
  - Importance to Increase Physical Activity: 8.86
  - Importance to Make Changes to Diet: 8.43
  - Confidence to Make Changes: 8.11

Conclusions

- Although confidence in implementing change did not correlate with improved BMI outcomes, the families’ reported high levels of importance in making change remains compelling.
- Further research is needed to examine the relationship between confidence levels and behavior change.
- Identification of tools and techniques for the interdisciplinary health care team supporting behavior change and improved health outcomes for families with children with special needs is needed.
- Future directions would include examining the benefits of patient centered treatment goals and motivational interviewing to strengthen confidence and identify barriers to change.

Limitations:

- The range of confidence and importance was limited and positively skewed, reducing power to detect differences.
- Importance and confidence were only assessed at baseline, and likely changed over time as families began to implement changes.