

HSE Addressing Weight Stigma: A Dietitian-Led Online Information Session for Parents

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Background

Conversations about weight are often challenging for parents due to concerns about causing harm.

Research indicates that negative parental language about food and weight can reinforce weight stigma and contribute to unhealthy behaviours in children; therefore, it is essential that parents are supported to use appropriate language when discussing food and health in the home.

Aim & Objectives

The aim of this project was to create an online information session to provide parents with support around managing conversations about food and weight in the home. The project also aimed to encourage the adoption of evidence-based habits that promote health across the household.

Research Design

Health promotion dietitians partnered with paediatric dietitians to develop a 60-minute information session called 'How we talk about weight matters'. The session script was created using published evidence and common experiences of weight stigma described in materials from obesity support and advocacy organisations. To ensure the content was relevant, acceptable, and appropriate for parents, a focus group with eight parents recruited through a local parenting organisation was conducted to inform and refine the tone, clarity, and messaging of the session. A conversational video featuring two dietitians discussing the topic was then recorded.

The session was delivered by the health promotion dietitians and was offered six times in 2025. A live questions and answers section was included at the end of each event with the support of a paediatric dietitian.

The event was advertised using paid social media advertisements targeting parents in north Dublin.

Results

- A total of 1680 individuals registered to attend a session, with 610 people attending (36%).
- The majority of participants attended live, with poor watch back rate noted (Figure 1)
- The majority of parents (84%) said that they were more confident about managing weight conversations following the session.
- Seventy-seven percent said that they would change their behaviour in the way they talk about food and weight in the household as a result of attending the session.

Results continued

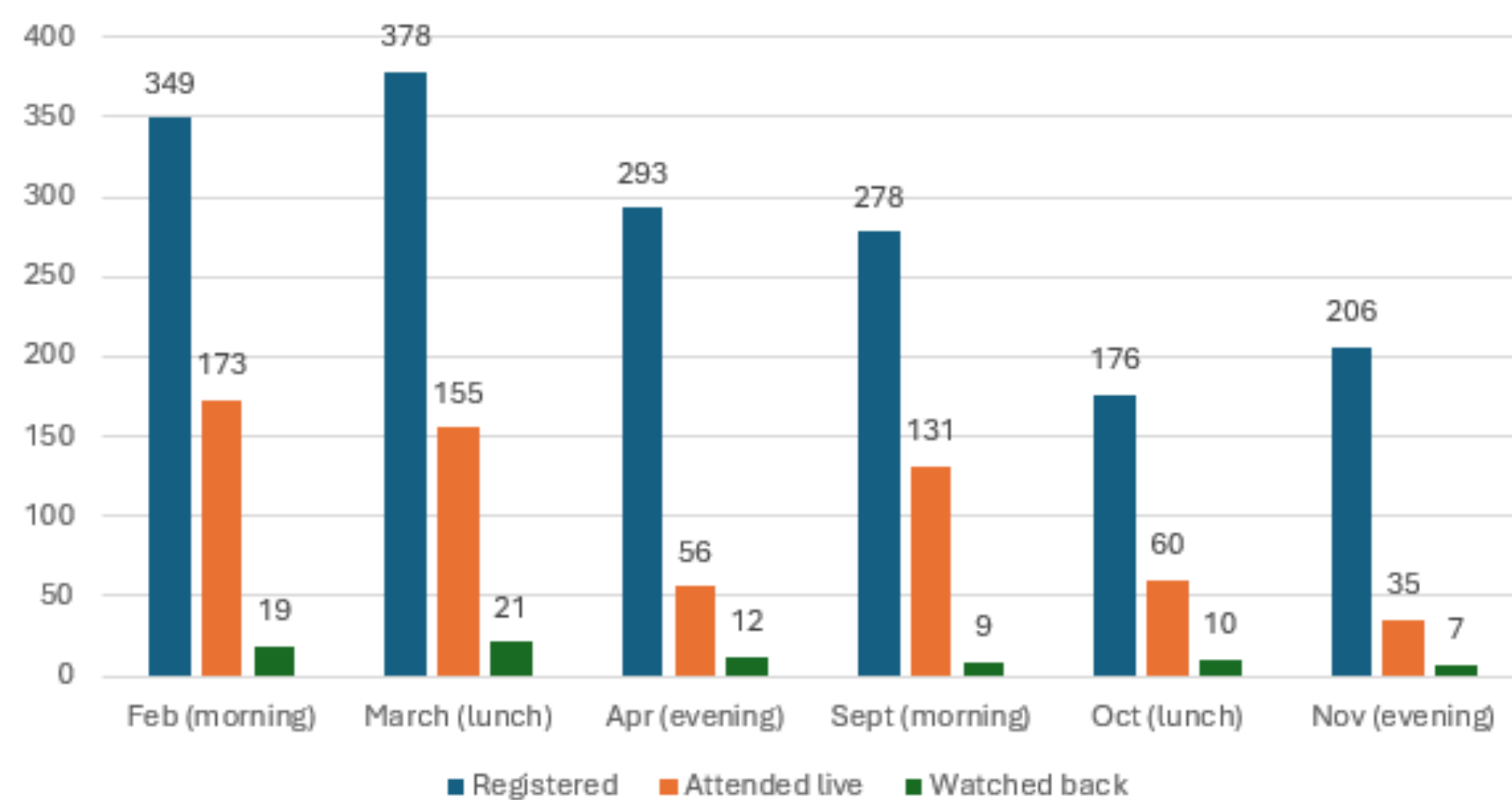


Figure 1: Number of people who registered, attended or watched back per month for first year of session.

- When asked what 'main message' they took from the webinar, the majority of parents reported the importance of using neutral, non-judgmental language about food and modelling positive behaviours as an adult in the household:

"Small gradual changes, don't blame myself, make time for meal prep; wonderful tips"

"Don't comment good or bad on own body shape or others"

"I'm doing a lot right but my own childhood experiences of how weight was discussed has impacted on my behaviour as a mother (not in a good way). This morning will help me begin to address that. Thank you"



Conclusion

Given the widespread prevalence of weight stigma and the large number of families affected, dietitian-led online information sessions offer a scalable, cost-effective public health approach to delivering evidence-based information from a trusted source to parents at a population level.

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