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Body Image

Mental Health Series



What is Body Image?

Body Image is the way a person views their body, not just physically in mirrors or in a picture, but how you see yourself in your own mind. More than just the way you look, your body image describes how you feel and think about your body. This could include how you feel to walk around in your body, what you believe your appearance says to those around you, or how you categorize your body based on what shape you think it is. These thoughts can alter your daily life and are often related to what is called your “self-esteem.”

Self-esteem is slightly different than body image. Self-esteem refers to a person’s subjective sense of their overall worth or value. Basically, it means how much you like and appreciate yourself.

Having a healthy self-esteem can strongly affect your body image and vice versa. If you are confident in yourself and have positive feelings surrounding your body and its worth, this can greatly influence your

motivation. Make sure to recognize that body image and self-esteem are not what you see in the mirror; rather, it is what you see in your head. Your body will be with you from the day you are born and throughout the rest of your life. Take time to appreciate it and be positive about it because this can have a major impact on your daily and long-term moods.



How Body Image Affects Adolescents

Similar to how adults and parents struggle with body image issues, adolescents and young adults struggle



as well. If your adolescents have a poor body image, this will cause negative thoughts, but it can also negatively impact more things. A recent study found that people who are constantly preoccupied with their weight or have other forms of body dysmorphia will display higher levels of depression and anxiety symptoms. They are also more likely to have suicidal thoughts. Unhealthy body image is also linked directly to low self-esteem which can further increase these symptoms and cause adolescents to struggle with anger and low mood. These young people will be more likely to focus on negative thoughts and messages about their bodies and start forming comparisons to their peers or those portrayed in the media. This can lead to risky ways to lose weight, such as eating disorders or even talk of cosmetically altering their body. This affects all genders and all ages and needs to be prevented.



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How Parents Can Help Strengthen Their Child's Body Image

- 1. Be a Role Model for Positive Body Image**

The most influential role models a child will have is their parent. Although it may not always seem like it, parents really do have a strong impact on the way their child sees the world. Make sure to encourage your child to feel good about themselves. Also, set the example of complementing your own body and be accepting and loving of its flaws. Some other examples are showing that you are accepting of all body shapes and discourage negative body discourse that comes from societal messages, avoid talking about diets or encouraging your child to engage in diets, or avoid labeling foods as “good” or “bad” and focus more on their nourishing value.
- 2. Encourage Your Child to Engage in Movement**

When a person can appreciate their body and what it can do, this will form a strong basis for positive body image and self-esteem. Encourage your child to go outside and engage in physical activities. Help them learn that movement is fun and teach them to appreciate their physical health. This will shift the focus from how they see their body, to how their body can perform so many amazing things. It is also helpful to participate in these activities to lead by example. This can be done by going for a walk, going for a bike ride, swimming, etc. Make sure to find activities that they enjoy and take time to emphasize the value of health from physical activity instead of weight loss.
- 3. Teach and Help Your Child to Feel Confidence**

Adolescents are asked to balance many personal and social battles as they develop. It is necessary for them to have a confident base to be able to navigate these challenges well. Take time to help them learn healthy coping strategies for these challenges, such as getting enough rest, talking to a trusted person, or listening to music. Listen to their concerns about their body and encourage open communication. This will allow for you to talk about their personal strengths and help them see that they play an important role in your family. Additionally, refrain from making comments on their bodies that could be offensive or discouraging.
- 4. Be Involved with Your Community and Schools**

Children spend most of their time at school and

with peers. Make sure that you are involved in helping these organizations and communities become a positive environment. Reach out to teachers and administrators about any concerns regarding bullying or peer pressure. Pay attention to those with whom your child spends time. If you sense that their friends are potentially a negative influence, encourage your child to mix with other children through different extracurriculars.

- 5. Get Help**

Lastly, remember that you are one person and can't do everything. If you feel that your child is severely struggling with body image, self-esteem, or eating disorders, seek professional help. Additionally, spend time on [ParentGuidance.org](https://www.parentguidance.org) to learn more about how you can build your child's confidence and increase their happiness.

Check out [ParentGuidance.org](https://www.parentguidance.org) for courses like Body Love, Fearless Confidence & Peace, Rewriting Self-Beliefs, and more!



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