

Fostering a Healthy Body Image in Kids



Highlights

Positive body image leads to greater self-esteem and a healthier outlook on life.

Children as young as 3 years of age start to recognise their bodies.

Media and parental influence affect a child's body image.

Parents can positively influence their child's body image by encouraging enjoyable physical activities and focusing on achievements.

Avoid having frequent discussions about weight and encourage a healthy lifestyle to address weight concerns with your children.

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What Is Body Image?

Body image is how you feel about your body and how it looks. It is shaped by what you think and believe about your size, shape, and weight and how you identify with your gender.

Adolescence is a high-risk time for poor body image and other issues such as eating disorders. Body image is also important for young children. By the age of 3 or 4 years, children start to realise that their bodies belong to them.

They will recognise that their body is different from other people at around 4 or 5 years old.

Research has shown that some children as young as 4 are not happy with their body and may have a poor body image. It is important to encourage positive body image from a young age.

Understanding Positive Body Image

A positive body image means that you accept your body and appearance most of the time, without thinking badly of yourself based on how you look.

It is important to build a positive body image from a young age for your child's mental and physical wellbeing.

If a child has a positive body image, it means they accept, appreciate, and respect their body. Even if they don't like a part of themselves, body positivity will help them feel comfortable about their body most of the time.

It's important for everyone to feel good about their body so that they have better self-esteem or a healthier sense of self. A positive body image also helps self-acceptance and can help prevent eating disorders.

A child with a positive body image will be more likely to:

- have a healthy view of themselves
- be self-accepting
- eat more healthily
- be physically active

Factors Affecting Your Child's Body Image

The way children feel about their bodies is affected by many things. This includes how their parents, relatives, teachers, and friends talk about their own bodies.

Teasing or making comments about your child's body can make them feel bad about themselves. It is also linked to anxiety, depression, and unhealthy eating behaviours.

Try to model good behaviour by being mindful when talking about weight and dieting. Also, do not judge your child's body. This can lead to your child developing a poor body image, even if they have nothing to worry about in terms of their own body shape and health.

Media, especially social media platforms, can influence poor body image. Social media usually only shows the edited highlights of people's lives and are usually filtered, adding to unrealistic ideals about appearance.

Be aware of the media your child is looking at. Your child may also notice your online presence. Take care with the comments that you make, and the people you engage with online. Encourage them to never make a comment about how someone looks, but how they seem, for example, happy or relaxed.

Friends and peers can also affect your child's body image by reinforcing unhelpful appearance ideals and behaviours.

Children who feel low about their body image have higher chances of developing unhealthy behaviours associated with food and exercise.

How to Build a Positive Body Image

You can strongly influence your child's body image. Here are some tips to help your child's attitude to their body:

Talk to them about what they see on social media. Explain that the images they see on the internet or in magazines aren't real - those people have stylists, special cameras, and computers to make them look like that.

Teach your child to be healthy, without focussing on their weight or appearance. Make exercise fun. Children love to use their bodies and learn what they can do. You can make physical activities part of your regular family outings. These may include swimming, dancing in the living room, kicking a ball around outside, or riding bikes.

If you hear your child putting themselves down and saying things such as 'I suck' or 'I hate my nose,' encourage your child to think instead about the things they like about themselves. These may be aspects of their appearance, character, or personality.

You can also teach your child to appreciate everything their body can do - it can breathe, move, and think.

Give your child compliments on their skill sets, knowledge, and personality instead of complimenting their appearance.

Talk to the school if you think your child is being bullied.

Talking to Your Child About Their Weight

You may be worried if your child is overweight or if others are teasing them about their weight. Talking to children about their weight can be difficult, but weight is an important part of health that should be discussed if there is a problem.

Tips to talk to your child about their weight:

Try to avoid commenting on your child's weight or talking about overweight in a negative way.

Try to avoid commenting on their physical appearance and find something about their character to comment on, for example, how kind they are or how hard they try.

Avoid using words like 'good' or 'bad' to describe food.

Completely banning a certain food type only makes us want it more. At times your child may choose to eat junk food, and that is ok.

Encourage your child to speak about how they are feeling, especially if they are experiencing bullying or negative comments about their weight.

If you're dieting yourself, or worried about your own body image, don't involve your child. However, it is a good idea to eat meals together as a family. Focus on healthy changes in eating behaviours.

You can help them achieve a healthy weight by: increasing the amount of

physical activity they do offering them a wide variety of healthy foods saving
foods with added salt, sugar, or fat as 'sometimes' foods
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Tools And Assistance

If you are worried about your child's body image, you can talk to:

your doctor
your child's school or their teacher
a child health nurse
a dietitian
a psychologist