

body image & self-esteem

a guide for parents and youth



Having a healthy body image means recognizing the individual qualities and strengths that make you feel good about yourself

What is Body Image & Self Esteem?

Body image is both the mental picture that you have of your body, and how you perceive yourself when you look in a mirror. Self-esteem is how you value and respect yourself as a person—it is the “real” opinion that you have of yourself. Self-esteem impacts how you take care of yourself, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Body image and self-esteem also directly influence one another—if you hate your body, it’s not easy to feel good about yourself.

When you have healthy body image, you feel comfortable about your body and you know how to take care of yourself. If your body is healthy and at its ideal body weight, you are able to listen to what it needs. This means that you and your body are not too irritable, tired or depressed, too easily frustrated, too anxious or angry, and you have enough energy to spend time with your friends and family, participate in sports and other activities that you enjoy, and concentrate on school or work.

People with good self-esteem often have positive and confident thoughts and feelings about their body. Having a healthy body image means recognizing the individual qualities and strengths

that make you feel good about yourself beyond weight appearance, and resisting the pressure to strive for the myth of the “perfect” body that you see in advertisements and in the media.

how do I know if I have negative self-esteem?

- You focus on your weight and perceived flaws in your body size and shape.
- You feel uncomfortable and self-conscious about your body.
- You are convinced that thinner people are happier or “better.”
- You believe that only other people are attractive.
- You exercise to lose weight or to “make up” for calories that you have eaten.

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It is important to remember that your body is unique. Our bodies are diverse—every body is a good body, and no one body shape or size is a healthy or right one for every body else. Even if everyone ate the same food and did the same amount of exercise for a whole year, no one would look the same at the end of the year. Each person's genetics influence their bone structure, body size, shape, and weight differently. Recognize that beauty, health and strength come in all sizes, and feel comfortable and confident in your natural body shape.



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What can I do?

1. Treat your body with respect.
2. Eat balanced meals full of a variety of appealing nutritious foods.
3. Enjoy regular, moderate exercise for the joy of feeling your body move and grow stronger, not just simply to lose weight, burn calories, and control your body fat.
4. Get enough rest so you can enjoy each day.
5. Resist the pressure to judge yourself and others based on weight, shape, or size.
6. Respect people based on the qualities of their character and accomplishments, not just because they appear slim, well-built or "well put together."
7. Dress in a way that makes you feel good, that makes your own fashion statement and most of all, in clothes that fit you now.
8. Get rid of all the clothes in your closet that don't fit. This includes clothes that you can wear only when dieting and clothes that you wear to take away attention from your weight or shape.
9. Donate or store clothing that is too small, and make room for clothes that you enjoy wearing, and that make you feel comfortable in your body.
10. Surround yourself with positive friends and family who recognize your uniqueness and like you just as you are. When you are around people and things that make you feel good, you are less likely to base your self-esteem on how your body appears.

how do I know if I have a healthy body image and self-esteem?

- When you see yourself in a mirror or in your mind, you look at yourself as a whole person, not a collection of specific body parts.
- You accept and celebrate the uniqueness of your natural body shape and size.
- You understand that a person's physical appearance says very little about their character and value as a person.
- You feel comfortable and confident in your body, and refuse to spend time worrying about food, weight and counting calories.
- You know that real beauty is not just skin-deep. When you feel good about yourself and who you are, you stand taller and naturally carry yourself with a sense of confidence and self-acceptance that makes you beautiful and attractive regardless of your weight, size or shape. Beauty is confidence and attitude, and when you feel comfortable in your body, others will feel comfortable around you.

Where do I go from here?

Jessie's Legacy, a program of Family Services of the North Shore provides web based eating disorders prevention resources to support BC youth, families, educators and professionals.

Visit www.familyservices.bc.ca.



heretohelp

Mental health and substance use information you can trust

HeretoHelp is a project of the BC Partners For Mental Health and Addictions Information. The BC Partners are a group of nonprofit agencies working together to help individuals and families manage mental health and substance use problems, with the help of good quality information. We represent Anxiety Disorders Association of BC, BC Schizophrenia Society, Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division, Centre for Addiction Research of BC, FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health, Jessie's Legacy—a program of Family Services North Shore, and Mood Disorders Association of BC. The BC Partners are funded by BC Mental Health and Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.