

RAISING KIDS WITH A HEALTHY BODY IMAGE

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN



WHAT INFLUENCES BODY IMAGE IN CHILDREN?

Body image is not just about physical appearance. It also includes the way we think and feel about our bodies. Important sources of information for your child about body image include:

- Messages in the media about beauty and body size ideals.
- Comments your child hears about their body.
- How adults talk about their own bodies and the bodies of others.



Did you know?

Experiencing negative body image is not just a “girls’ problem”? Children of all genders are vulnerable, and the attitudes expressed by the adults in your child’s life matter!

HOW CAN I BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL FOR MY CHILDREN?

There are lots of ways that you can promote positive body image in your child. Here are some helpful **Do’s and Don’ts** to guide you:

DO

- Encourage values not related to appearance, such as kindness and honesty.
- Appreciate your child’s strengths and abilities, showing your caring with words and actions.
- Create a supportive home environment for your child to explore both physical and non-physical activities.
- Help your child understand that there is no one standard of beauty or ideal body size. You can do this by pointing out that diversity is healthy and normal.
- Help your child understand that criticizing body shape and appearance is bullying and harmful.

DON’T

- Make negative comments or comparisons about other people’s bodies or appearance.
- Criticize your own body shape or appearance in front of your child.
- Express a preference for thin bodies. Instead of focusing on shape and weight, focus on what makes a healthy body, such as getting good sleep, drinking enough water, eating a varied diet and getting physical exercise.
- Judge your child for being concerned about their body or appearance. Instead, listen to their concerns and offer support.

Even when it might seem like your child is not listening!



Children start to form eating habits and develop body image at a very young age.

As parents, you are the main source of information for shaping your child’s attitudes. By modelling healthy behaviours and attitudes, you can help your child evaluate the messages they get outside of the home. Helping your child develop these skills early can help them grow up confident and resilient.

More info: embodybc.com

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD DEVELOP HEALTHY EATING HABITS?

You can help your child form healthy eating habits early in life by teaching them to pay attention to the signals their body gives them. Promoting independence around food at an early age helps teach your child to trust their bodies and their needs. Some **helpful guidelines** are:

DO

- Involve your child in planning, preparing and tasting meals.
- Support your child to eat when they are hungry and stop eating when they are full.
- Eat together as a family as often as possible.
- Turn off devices and limit distractions during mealtimes. Use this time to connect and talk with your child.
- Role model eating a balanced diet of “everyday” foods and “sometimes” foods.



Food for thought:

What you say and do matters! Have you examined your own beliefs about body image, shape and weight, and what health means to you?

DON'T

- Label foods as “good/bad” or “healthy/unhealthy.” Instead, introduce foods as “everyday” foods and “sometimes” foods.
- Force your child to eat all the food on their plate if they say they are full. This may teach them to eat beyond their natural feelings of fullness.
- Rush through meal times. This can make it hard for your child to pay attention to their hunger and fullness signals.
- Use food as a bribe or reward. This can teach your child to eat for reasons other than hunger.
- Use food to comfort or calm down unpleasant emotions in your child. Instead, listen and offer support.
- Restrict food because of a fear of weight gain.

WHAT IF I AM CONCERNED ABOUT MY CHILD'S WEIGHT?

- Putting pressure on your child to lose weight may put them at risk for engaging in unhealthy weight control behaviours like chronic dieting, weight cycling (gaining and losing weight repeatedly), and eating disorders as they get older.
- Encouraging your child to feel good about their body does not mean encouraging them to be unhealthy or to continue to gain weight. In fact, having a positive body image makes it more likely that your child will participate in healthy behaviours like regular exercise and balanced eating.

WHAT IF MY CHILD IS A PICKY EATER?

At this age your child's taste preferences are developing, and it often takes trying a new food several times (ten times or more is common!) before they begin to enjoy it. Be patient. Do not force new foods on your child. Instead, make new food choices available to them, and keep introducing them until your child reaches for them themselves.

Involving your child in grocery shopping and the food preparation process provides an opportunity to get your child interested and curious about trying new foods. This strategy also promotes their independence and creativity!



More info: embodybc.com

RESEARCH SHOWS

that helping your child feel confident about themselves and their abilities can help lay the foundation for them to feel positively about their bodies and appearance too.

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