

Peer Pressure & Body Image

Oftentimes peer pressure is a factor in how children see themselves, including body image. Body image is a big part of your child's self-esteem. If children don't like the way they look or are dissatisfied with their bodies, their self-esteem will suffer, and low self-esteem can lead to depression and anxiety. How children see themselves can affect every aspect of their lives — either negatively or positively. It affects their choices, both long-term and short-term. It can impact their ability to meet people and make friends. It can prevent them from wanting to try new things.

Poor body image is most often associated with girls, but boys suffer from it, too. They can feel as though they don't have enough muscles or that they aren't tall enough. Girls are, however, the most likely to suffer a negative outcome that involves eating disorders.

PLAN TO IMPROVE HEALTH: NOW IS THE TIME TO CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

The way you talk about your body will influence your child. The meals you eat and serve, whether you exercise, and the importance you place on how you look will influence your child. Here are some tips:

Don't talk about dieting. Do talk about eating healthy.

Don't talk about exercising to lose weight. Do talk about exercising to be stronger.

Don't talk about wanting to improve your body to be more attractive. Do talk about improving to be ready for whatever life has to offer.

Don't use the "clean plate" measure of food. Do teach your child to pause and determine whether he or she is full or satisfied.

Don't skip meals. Do show your children that it's important to eat three healthy meals a day.

Don't only eat diet foods. Do eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, and lean meats

Don't make every food decision for your child. Do give your child a say in what he or she eats. Let your child help choose foods at the grocery store. Use this time to educate your children on good food choices. Tell them that eating a variety of food is important for growing and to be strong.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

To some extent, being preoccupied with body image is normal, especially during the tween and teen years. Do not worry too much, especially if you don't see body image interfering with your child's normal activities, friendships, or willingness to attend social gatherings. Continue to encourage your child and build his or her self-esteem. If you begin to see your child withdraw from friends or activities, it could be a warning sign of a more serious response to low self-esteem and body image.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

- How can I talk to my child about his or her weight?
- How can I recognize an eating disorder?
- What can I do to help my child feel more confident?
- How can I help my child develop healthy eating habits?
- How can I lose weight without it negatively impacting my child's sense of body image?

