



# A WAY OF BEING WITH CHILDREN

## Discussing Body Image

Tips for Parents and Caregivers

### Discussing Weight/Body Insecurity

During adolescence, teens typically develop their sense of self between the ages of 12 and 18. This encompasses their self-perception, perceptions of others, and their place in the world. Body image refers to our perceptions and feelings about our bodies, which may not necessarily align with our actual weight, appearance, shape, or size. Poor or negative body image can impact negatively our physical, psychological and social health.

Many young people feel concerned about their body image during adolescence, a time when the body undergoes rapid physical changes. Alongside these physical changes, significant emotional shifts also occur. During puberty, adolescents often compare themselves to others and evaluate their self-worth based on their appearance. Most of us have experienced this at some point in our lives. Various factors, including personal thoughts and feelings, social media, family environment, peers, and cultural or ethnic influences, can shape how we perceive our bodies as well as how we feel about them.

Negative or poor body image can affect our self-esteem, causing us to feel self-conscious or distressed about our physical appearance. It can also leave us feeling dissatisfied or uncomfortable with our bodies.



### Emotional Impact

- Emotional impact:
- Feelings of sadness
- Loneliness
- Increased concerns about appearance
- Distress

### Behavioral and Social Impact:

- Consistently comparing or criticizing physical body
- Avoidance of social interactions
- Isolation
- Disengagement or avoidance of activities
- Change in eating habits
- Feeling pressured to cover up parts of the body
- Increased change for physical activities
- Increased concerns about being accepted by others

It is common for adolescents to experience insecurities and make comparisons; however, if these feelings interfere with their overall mood or ability to engage in and enjoy activities, professional help may be needed. Persistent and frequent negative body image can lead to eating disorders, excessive exercise, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.



# Social Media and Body Image

Social media can be both beneficial and potentially risky for adolescents. The exposure to images, videos, and content can influence their perception of body image. Challenges associated with social media include unrealistic expectations, peer pressure, and bullying. Increased exposure to unhealthy body ideals can negatively affect body image. By reducing exposure to certain social media content and setting healthy boundaries, the negative impact on self-image can be minimized.

## Promoting Positive Body Image

- Create a safe, non-judgmental space for your child to share their thoughts and feelings about their body.
- Avoid labeling or categorizing body types as “good” or “bad.”
- Model self-compassion and positive self-talk.
- Use statements that foster resilience and provide emotional support.
- Encourage the use of healthy coping skills during times of distress.
- Promote supportive relationships and strong social connections.
- Celebrate body diversity and encourage acceptance of all body types.
- Encourage regular physical activity with a focus on overall health and well-being.
- Set healthy boundaries around social media content to reduce negative influences.

## Red Flags

Here are some weight/body image red flags for parents to watch for, as they may indicate the need for additional support:

### Behavioral:

- Excessive focus on appearance
- Extreme dieting or skipping meals
- Compulsive exercising
- Avoidance of social situations
- Hiding food/secretive eating

### Emotional:

- Negative self-talk
- Mood changes
- Low self-esteem

### Physical:

- Sudden weight changes
- Physical complaints (cold, dizzy, fatigue, stomach issues)
- Changes in clothing choices (baggy/oversized)

### Social Media Related Signs:

- Obsession with social media
- Posting and later deleting images
- Avoiding photos



Get more resources at: [www.centerforchildcounseling.org/awayofbeing](http://www.centerforchildcounseling.org/awayofbeing)