

Tips Sheet Parents

Talking to your child about body image

Your teen may want to talk to you after completing the Body Kind Youth Survey. This may be about some of the questions, their responses, their feelings or just about the topic of body image in general. Here is some information and tips to help you have a positive conversation:

A bit about body image

Body image is the thoughts, feelings and attitudes we have about our bodies and how we look. Our body image influences our eating and exercise behaviours, as well as our mental health.

It is common for young people to feel different things about their body and appearance; sometimes satisfied or dissatisfied, sometimes neutral.

Whilst it is natural for teens to experience body dissatisfaction from time to time, if you feel your teen is increasingly becoming preoccupied with their body shape/size/weight, or if they have begun engaging in behaviours to modify their appearance, body or muscles it is important to take this seriously. Body dissatisfaction can impact mood and mental health negatively and can also flag that more serious body image or eating issues are developing or being experienced.

Tips for talking with your teen

- Aim to do more listening than talking
- Listen with openness
- Avoid responding or reacting with judgement
- Approach what your teen is saying with curiosity – given them the opportunity and space to share their thoughts without jumping in
- You do not have to fix their feelings in that moment – listen and be empathetic
- Share appropriate experiences that can help you relate and connect
- Avoid criticising or shaming your own body or appearance in an effort to make your child feel better

Key messages to promote a positive body image

You are so much more than a body. How you look and your body size does not define your worth as a human.

Making body and appearance comparisons negatively impacts self-esteem and body image. It's OK to admire the appearance of others, but avoid devaluing your own body or appearance.

Focus on the body's function – what can and does it do. Focus on more than just the aesthetic, extending body gratitude to what a body can do and how it functions can help improve body image.

Show kindness to your body. Move in ways you enjoy, nourish your body to fuel it and for enjoyment and nurture your body with rest and kind words.

Be media and social media savvy. Despite what we might see, no one is perfect. Find ways to be body kind to yourself and others whilst on socials

Go easy on yourself and others. Body bullying or food shaming is never ok. Use positive and kind words to yourself and body and also to others carefully. Build body image up, not tear it down.

Taking pride in your appearance and expressing yourself through fashion is ok, just make sure it's fun and helps you to feel good in your body.

Surround yourself with people who accept you as you are. You are enough just as you are and you don't need to change for anyone.

You can download the full tips sheet, [here](#)

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Role modelling positive body image to your child

Role modelling positive body image is not only good for yourself but your family. Whilst it's not always easy, do your best to:

- Speak kindly about your own body and all bodies
- Move your body for health and wellbeing (instead of weight, body shape or muscle size)
- Express gratitude for what your body has done for you and what it can do
- Be aware of weight and appearance biases and challenging these
- Practice self-compassion and self-care in a way that works for you
- Celebrate differences and non-appearance based qualities and achievements
- Embrace your teen's changing body and do your very best not to comment on their weight or body shape changes.

And remember, if you need help to have a more compassionate and accepting relationship with your body it's never too late to reach out for help.

Further help for parents – Body Kind Families

For more resources and important tips for parents of teenagers on supporting positive body image and being Body Kind. Includes videos, factsheets, audio

resources and family activities. For further information, see butterfly.org.au/bodykindfamilies

Seek support early if concerned.

Despite best efforts, serious eating and body image issues do develop. If you are concerned, seeking support, further information or referrals sooner than later is important. Early intervention can reduce the severity and duration and make a full recovery, possible.

Butterfly's free and confidential National Helpline can support you with advice and referral information.

Phone Email Webchat 1800 33 46731
butterflynationalhelpline.org.au

Some other resources:

- For further information about body image and eating disorders visit butterfly.org.au
- Online Early Intervention websites for parents/caregivers who may be noticing problematic behaviours in their teen. These are simple checklists to complete, which you can share with the Butterfly National Helpline staff or other health professionals:
 - How Far Is Too Far howfaristoo.org.au
 - Feed Your Instinct feedyourinstinct.com.au
 - Reach Out and Recover (older teens/young adults) reachoutandrecover.com.au

CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEONE?

Butterfly's free and confidential National Helpline can support you.
butterfly.org.au/helpline | butterfly.org.au