



EMPOWERING PARENTS TO RAISE
THEIR CHILDREN TO BE SUBSTANCE-FREE

Talk Early And Often About Alcohol, Tobacco And Other Drugs. Even When It Gets Tough

Know! Body Image Matters

Summer is a bare-it-all season of sleeveless tops, shorts and bathing suits, so what better time than now to talk with youth about their body image.

Body Image is the way individuals think and feel about their own body, as well as how they perceive others to think and feel about their appearance. Heavily influenced by family, friends and media, one's body image can be positive or negative.

The majority of youth, unfortunately, say they are not satisfied with their body size, shape or weight; 90% of females and up to 60% of males reported negative feelings about their body (that's right, body image affects our sons as well as our daughters).

There is nothing unusual or unhealthy with teens being concerned about their appearance, or occasionally feeling self-conscious. It is a problem however, when one's negative body image becomes all-consuming, producing extreme feelings of low self-worth, constant comparison to others and envy. Such feelings can lead to poor self-esteem, depression and even suicidal thoughts (contributing to binge drinking and other drug use, in an attempt to escape the pain). Other dangerous behaviors may accompany negative body image as well, like restrictive dieting and binge eating (most common among girls), or the use of drugs and supplements to enhance physique (most common among boys).

Teens with a positive body image are more likely to feel good about themselves, take proper care of their bodies and radiate confidence.

So what exactly does a positive body image consist of and how can we, as parents and caregivers, help to foster it in our children?

Positive body image is the recognition and acceptance that healthy bodies come in different shapes and sizes; that body size and shape does not predict success or happiness; that people are more than numbers on a scale; and that images in the media are unrealistic and created to sell a product.

To promote a healthier, more positive body image within our children:

- Be your child's role model by accepting and appreciating your own body, expressing a positive attitude towards food and exercise and by breaking the habit (if you have one) of making unkind comments about the way other people look
- Focus and give praise to children based more on their individual skills, talents and abilities and less on their appearance
- Encourage participation in exercise and activities that will help them feel good about themselves
- Teach children to think critically about the images and messages they are exposed to in the media
- Sit down to dinner with your children whenever possible to share a healthy meal and conversation
- Help children develop a positive social support system by encouraging them to befriend people who are positive, confident and inspire them to be their best

For youth experiencing eating disorders, depression or suicidal thoughts, or those who have turned to substances for help or comfort, please contact your family physician immediately to seek outside help.

SOURCES: [REUTERS: Body image issues lead to depression, drug use in teen boys: study \(2013\)](#). [Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences \(IFAS\): Improving Your Body Image: Tips for Individuals, Families, and Professionals](#). [AboutKidsHealth: Body Image: Promoting a Positive Body Image](#). [JAMA Pediatrics – Study: Prospective Associations of Concerns About Physique and the Development of Obesity, Binge Drinking, and Drug Use Among Adolescent Boys and Young Adult Men \(2014\)](#)

Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

Know! encourages you to share this Parent Tip with friends and family.

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Know! is a program of:



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