



SpeakUp!

Body Image

Dr. Jenna DiLossi led a discussion on Body Image, defining important concepts and sharing strategies for supporting our children and ourselves. Below are tips and takeaways from Dr. Jenna and parenting adults.

What is Body Image?

Body image is the perception of your physical self in addition to your thoughts and feelings that result from that perception.

- Body Image may impact behavior.
- Body Image stems from societal/cultural norms and beauty ideals.
- 1/2 of girls and 1/3 of boys use drastic measures to curb eating
- Body Checking, related to body image, is grabbing, looking, or checking your body in a way that make body image top of mind. The more you look at something, the more meaning you give it.

Body Positivity and Body Neutrality

Body Positivity is a social movement created to empower individuals regardless of their physical body weight, shape, and size. Body Neutrality, in contrast, is a philosophy that implies that the way our body functions is more important than what it looks like.

- There is a lot of bias in the health industry as well as discrimination against those with bigger bodies. Both of these concepts help to recognize and address these biases.
- There is an overuse of BMI in the health care industry, and BMI is not a valid health factor.
- Body Positivity focuses more on a person's aesthetic, while body positivity focuses more on what your body does.

Modeling

Being aware of your own language and behaviors towards your body and others' bodies can help you model positive behaviors for your child. Below are a few suggestions:

- Self reflect on your own beliefs about weight, food, and what it means to be a larger size.
- Do not comment on the aesthetic of your child's body.

- Do not assume your own beliefs and reactions to body image are the same as your child's; body ideals and beauty standards have changed.

Mental Health and Body Image

During the conversation we discussed the correlation between mental health and body image. Below are a few takeaways:

- Anxiety, depression, and OCD correlate to disordered eating.
- People who are highly self critical sometimes move to food control.
- Depression and anxiety can lead to appetite loss, which can lead to weight loss. Often when people lose weight they are complimented, which can lead to disordered eating. This is why you should avoid complimenting someone on weight loss.

Emotional Eating or Eating When Bored

Eating more when you are emotional or bored is very common. The parenting adults on the call shared a few suggestions for curbing this type of eating:

- Set small goals to monitor your emotional eating.
- "Ride the Wave" of the urge to eat. Give it 20 minutes and then see how you feel.
- Decrease the mindlessness of eating-- avoid eating in front of a screen or when driving.
- Extend meal times so your brain has time to send the signal of being full. Make meals at least 30 minutes, and snacks at least 10 minutes.
- Increase mindfulness when eating.
- Control your environment by having healthy snacks readily available and things you tend to overeat out of sight.
- Know your preferences for overeating- awareness can help.

Helpful Strategies

We discussed different ways to support youth, as well as other adults with body image. Below are a few strategies:

- Practice leaning in vs. reassurance by saying things like, "we don't all have perfect bodies, but that doesn't define us."
- Validate your child's experience and avoid rushing to a solution as "fix it" strategies can often lead to diet, exercise, and other practices that can reinforce the negative feeling.
- Make sure your child has other things they feel positive about. When they feel negative about their bodies, they have positive thoughts to fall back on.
- Focus on objective data and behavior, rather than aesthetic, when discussing body image with your child. Include your doctor in these discussions and stay consistent with medical advice.
- Be honest with your child about your own food choices and emphasize health over the aesthetic. Consider narrating out loud, "I need to do this for my health, but I don't want this to impact you."

- Treat thinner and healthier children the same-- if there is no double scoop ice cream for your heavier child, there should be no double scoop for the thinner child either. This keeps you focused on health and not aesthetic.
- Help your child control negative feelings by reminding them of a "kitten vs. tiger." You can care about what you look like, without letting it consume you.
- Share the biology of weight so your child can understand the way their body changes as they mature.
- Show yourself compassion- even when you say the wrong thing about body image, it comes from a place of love

As mentioned in our discussion, we recognize that we are all at a different place in our journey. Below are some resources we can use to continue our journey in this process:

- [Click Here](#) for The National Eating Disorder Association
- Join the [I Weigh Community](#)
- Connect with Dr. Jenna: @Evidence Based Besties; jenna@centerforhopeandhealth.com
- Watch the Social Dilemma, a documentary on social media, how it is used, and the impact on body image
- [SpeakUp's Support House](#)

If anyone has any additional questions or needs help connecting to resources, please email Erica Talley at etalley@speakup.org

Be well,
Martie Bernicker & The SpeakUp! Team
www.speakup.org | 610-519-9600

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