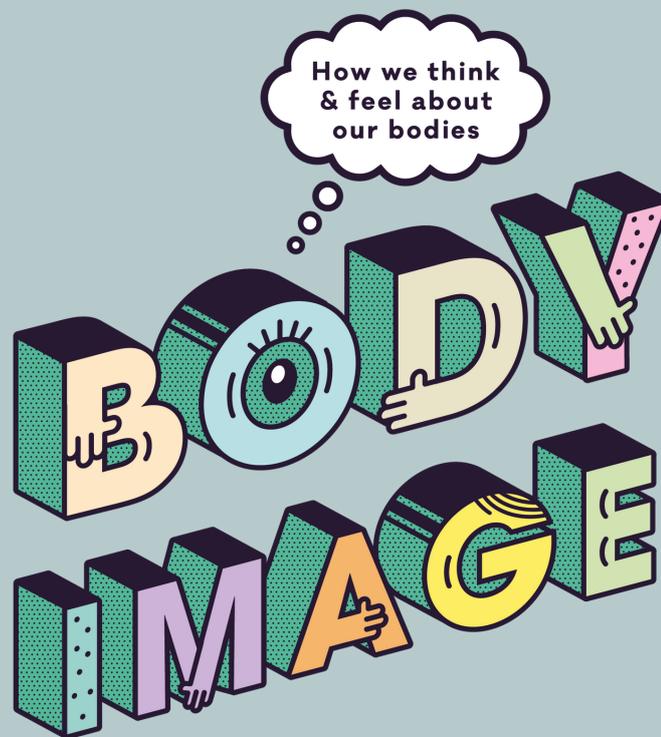




Peer Education Project



A Guide for Parents and Caregivers



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"Treat yourself in the same way that you would treat others- acknowledge the negative thought and then ask yourself what you would say to a friend."

**Peer Educator
Peer Education Project**

What is body image?

Body image is how we think and feel about our bodies.

These thoughts and feelings can impact us throughout our lives and affect how accepting we are of our bodies and appearance, how much we value our bodies, and how we perceive our bodies in our environment.

A good body image is described as feeling comfortable with and accepting of our bodies. We can appreciate our bodies for their abilities as well as have a healthy balance between valuing how they look and valuing other aspects of ourselves.

"A HEALTHY BODY IMAGE ISN'T A DESTINATION. IT'S ABOUT THE JOURNEY TOWARDS ACCEPTANCE."

MHF Young Leader 

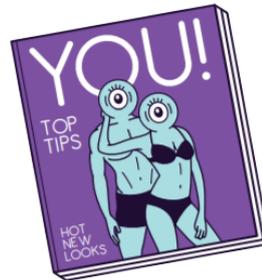
In contrast, having a poor body image is feeling unsatisfied or uncomfortable with our body – either due to its appearance or the way that it functions. This is described as 'body dissatisfaction'.

The relationship we have with our body image can affect our mental health and wellbeing. Often, the challenge as parents and caregivers is knowing what you can do to help your child or young person develop and maintain a good body image. It is important you feel empowered to not only understand and recognise the signs of body image difficulties, but also where to signpost and seek support from.

What can affects body image?

There are many factors that can affect your child's body image – both positively and negatively. Such as:

- Their thoughts and feelings towards their own body
- The media and social media
- Family members
- Peers, especially close friends
- Health conditions or disabilities
- Life changes that affect how our bodies look and function, like puberty
- Ethnicity and culture



Find more information about how these factors affect body image in our [Body Image Report \(2019\)](#). You can also use the [Parenting teens: Dove Self-Esteem Project](#) resources, which support with topics such as:

- [Family, friends & relationships](#)
- [Teasing & bullying](#)
- [Respecting & looking after yourself](#)
- [Media & celebrities](#)
- [Talking about appearance](#)



How does **b**dy image link to mental health?

Body image is closely connected to our sense of self, our wellbeing, and our mental health. At times, we may feel unhappy with our bodies – many of us do.

When your child's thoughts and feelings about their bodies get in the way of them taking part in everyday activities and doing things they enjoy, it can indicate they are struggling with their body image.

Poor body image can be a risk factor for mental health problems such as anorexia and depression, but this is not always the case.

However, developing self-confidence and acceptance of our own body has been linked to good mental health and healthy ways of looking after ourselves. For example, eating a healthy, balanced diet.



Spotting the signs of poor body image

Many young people may be concerned about their body image – it's something we all experience from time-to-time.

However, there may be times when your child or young person feels very worried about their appearance, and you may notice changes in their behaviour or views on related topics.

By understanding and recognising when such body image concerns are negatively impacting their mental health and wellbeing, support can quickly be put in place.

Here are some signs of body image concerns to look out for in your child or young person:

- Noticeable changes in their mood and interaction with others.
- Changes in their eating and exercise patterns.
- Showing signs or expressing worries about how they look.
- Feeling pressured to cover up parts of their body and not wanting to engage in activities where their bodies will be on show e.g. swimming or Physical Education lessons.
- Avoiding any photos being taken of them.
- Spending a significant amount of time editing photos and using specific apps to alter their appearance significantly.
- Expressing rigid thinking patterns about what is a 'good' vs 'bad' body type.

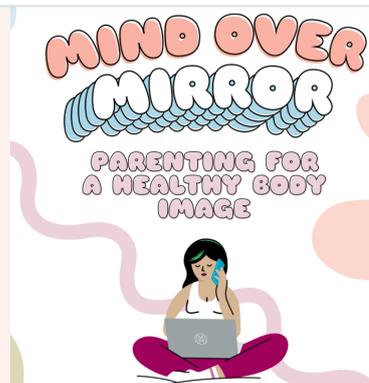
Spotting the signs of poor body image

If you are worried about your child or young person, it is important to give the time and space at home to allow for conversations about how they are feeling and the concerns they have.



Take a look at our [Time For Us Parents Pack](#) for ideas of how to talk about feelings between you and your child.

Read our [Mind Over Mirror - Parenting for a healthy body image guide](#) for tips on how to open such conversations.



YOUNGMINDS
fighting for young people's mental health

Contact [Young Minds' Parents Helpline](#) for free, confidential advice via phone, email or webchat.

Top tips for supporting your child to develop good body image?

It can be challenging to know how to support your child or young person with developing and maintaining a good body image. It is important to create a safe and nurturing environment, where they can be open about body image worries they may have. Read our [Mind Over Mirror - Parenting for a healthy body image guide](#) for tops tips and conversation starters!

Here are some top tips for supporting your child or young person to build a good body image.

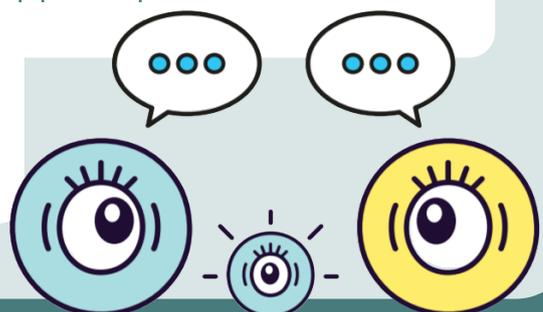
Check in with your own body image.

As parents and caregivers, our own body image can affect how we relate to our child's body image. Try and model positive behaviour - avoid criticising your own appearance (or that of others) around young people and model healthy eating and activity.

The Mental Health Foundation published [seven tips that you can use to promote a healthy body image in yourself](#).

Myth-bust the "Perfect Body" together.

Talk with your child about bodies on television, in magazines and on the internet. Explain that many of these images are retouched or changed so the bodies appear "perfect" – and that often it is very hard to notice! Encourage them to not see bodies as 'perfect', but as unique to each person.



Top tips for supporting your child to develop good body image?



Give character-based and achievement-based compliments.

It is important to encourage your child to think about their value beyond just their appearance, and instead appreciate what makes them who they are. You can still compliment their appearance, but it's also helpful to focus your compliments on non-appearance-related qualities and efforts.

Take a look at this resource on the [importance of self-esteem](#), which provides some simple, easy-to-follow top tips to help build your child's self-esteem.

Value health not weight.

Try not to place unrealistic expectations on appearance or conveying that they would be better if they changed their weight or shape. Instead, focus on the health benefits that a good body image can bring and celebrate individuality.



If you are concerned about your child's relationship with their body image, and that it is impacting their eating and exercise habits, contact [BEAT: Eating Disorders](#) for advice.

Top tips for supporting your child to develop good body image?

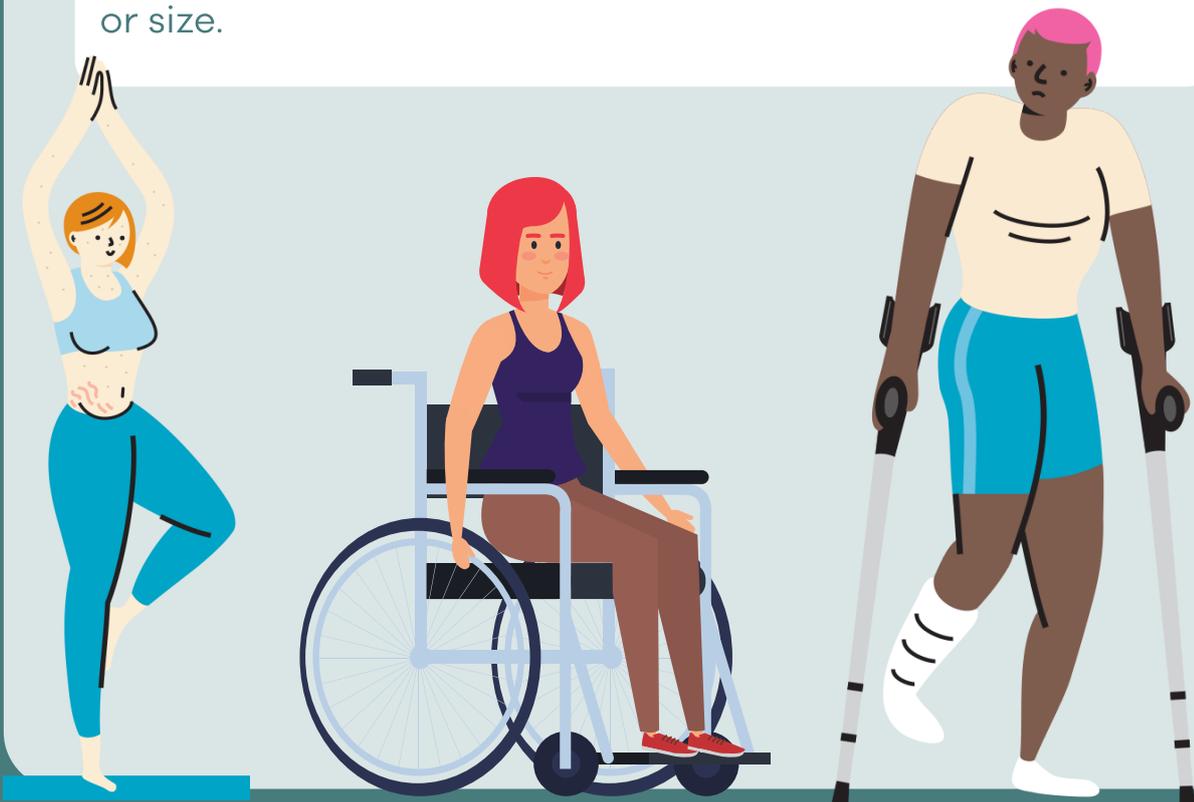
Encourage communication about their feelings.

Support your child to feel comfortable to express their emotions and communicate their feelings about their bodies.

Read these tips for talking to [your child](#) or [your teenager](#) about their feelings.

Teach your child or young person that all bodies deserve respect.

Show that people deserve respect regardless of body shape or size.



Top tips for supporting your child to develop good body image?

Be active together.

All children need regular physical activity they enjoy. It doesn't matter what they do, but it is important they are active in some way.

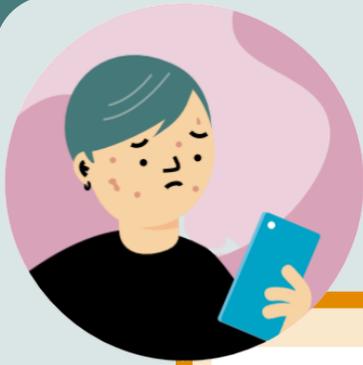
Monitor phone and app use.

Support your child to spring-clean the apps and social media accounts on their smartphone and encourage them to spend less time on their phones. You can model positive behaviour by spending less time on your phone.

Report adverts that encourage unhealthy relationships with the body.

If you see an advert in a magazine, on television, or online that you think presents an unhealthy body image as aspirational, you can complain to the Advertising Standards Authority. [You find information on how to lodge a complaint here.](#)

[Read this guide to find out ways to help your child navigate body images issues and the impact of advertising.](#)



Personal stories

Click on each story to read further.

Danny's story
A fixation on body image and deep feelings of shame



100k views
View all 1205 comments
1 DAYS AGO

Frances' story
How I think and feel about my body



100k views
View all 1205 comments
1 DAYS AGO

Paul's story
Feelings about my body image are a 'work in progress'



100k views
View all 1205 comments
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Kerry's story
I constantly battle with my body image



100k views
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1 DAYS AGO

Michael's story
When my body changed I didn't know how to feel



100k views
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1 DAYS AGO

Tyra's story
Mind Over Mirror - Facing my mirror



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