

Girls and Body Image – Information for Parents and Carers

"Body image" definition: one's perceptions, feelings, and behaviors toward one's body

Help your female family members learn to identify unrealistic media representations of beauty and to value themselves for who they are.

Did you know?

- Body image develops early in childhood.
- Body image is influenced by family and culture.
- Exposure to traditional media is a risk factor for developing body dissatisfaction.

Facts about body image in the UK

- One in five preadolescent girls suffer severe anxiety about their appearance.
- By 15 years old 49% of girls have been on a diet
- Girls are twice as likely to suffer body image anxiety as boys.
- More than half of girls age 6–8 indicate their ideal body is thinner than their current body.
- 87% of female characters age 10–17 on the most popular children's TV shows are below average in weight.
- 70% of teenage girls will not do certain activities at because of body image anxiety

What's the issue?

Our media and culture are obsessed with women's looks. Magazines have weekly features such as "Body Watch" that criticise female celebrities for being too heavy or too thin. TV and movie stars showcase unrealistic body types that most girls can't copy without hurting themselves. Ads tell girls that, with the right beauty products, they can look picture-perfect. And female characters in family films, on prime-time TV, and on kids' shows are nearly twice as likely to have uncharacteristically small waists as compared to their male counterparts.

With the advent of social media, older girls are no longer passive consumers of these messages; they're creating and sharing images of their own. But online culture is full of judgment, too. Girls often imitate celebrities by posing provocatively in selfies. They see their photos ranked for attractiveness on apps such as *'Hot or Not'* and in online beauty pageants on Instagram. They're told they can "improve" their images with editing apps that whiten their teeth or put a sparkle in their eyes.

Why body image matters for girls

The pressure to live up to such narrow beauty standards and always be "camera-ready" can affect both physical and mental health. Online communities dedicated to promoting unhealthy behavior, such as "thinspo" (for "thin-spiration") and "pro-ana" (pro-anorexia) sites, urge followers to starve themselves.

When girls compare themselves to their favorite stars, they usually feel that they don't measure up. Lowered self-confidence and self-esteem can lead to depression, poor school performance, and risky choices.

What families can do

- **Watch what you say.** Body image isn't shaped by media alone. Families have a big influence on young people's self-perception. Focus on what bodies can do rather than what kids look like.
- **Look for alternative media.** Avoid TV, movies, and magazines that promote stereotypes and outdated gender roles. Seek out unconventional role models and talk about people from media and real life who have different body types and say why you find them beautiful (for example, they're kind or wise).
- **Expose the myths.** Point out that pictures have been altered to make models look flawless -- and impossibly thin.
- **Keep girls active.** Get them involved in sports, fitness, and other physical pursuits so they discover what healthy bodies can do.
- **Keep an eye on social networks.** Today's young people are living in a constant feedback loop of criticism. Help them put comments in perspective.

A Parent Tip video clip from Common Sense Media about Girls and Body Image can be viewed by clicking [here](#).