

How to improve language about Bodies and Appearance

Watch the accompanying video [here](#)



The language we use, the conversations we engage in and the amount we talk about bodies can have a significant impact on body image and eating and exercise attitudes and behaviours. This tip sheet is to help you improve the language around bodies and appearance to help your teen and family be more Body Kind.

"Appearance based talk" is common, particularly among girls (and women) and it happens everywhere.

It is any language, dialogue or conversation that involves appearance, weight, shape, size or 'the body'.

It may be used to share body insecurities or it may intended to be positive but unfortunately, any type of appearance talk reinforces body and appearance ideals, reinforces weight stigma (i.e. that there is a 'better' body or shape to have) and can increase unhelpful body comparisons. It does not help anyone feel good in or about their body!

Your teen may be using *appearance-based talk* to voice their body dissatisfaction or to communicate something else.

Listen and acknowledge.

If you notice an increase tune in and if it persists seek help. For more information see the video and tips sheet '[What to do if you are concerned.](#)'

Tips for Parents/Caregivers

- Encourage your teen to avoid conversations about appearance by walking away, changing the subject or taking a stand. "I don't think talking this way about ourselves is very helpful for me/us". "This is boring, can we talk about something else?" "I've decided to try and appreciate the body I have, so I'm going to start by not bullying it anymore".
- Strive to give compliments to your teen and others that are not about looks. Complimenting a person's character, effort, talents is much more powerful.
- Be kind in the way you speak about your own and other bodies (face to face, online, anywhere) and encourage your teen and family members to do the same. You can use the [Body Kind Family Agreement](#) to create guidelines that work for your family.
- Avoid talking about body size and weight all together. It makes weight and shape the focus and that is really unhelpful when a positive body image is the goal.
- Encourage self-compassion rather than self-criticism by gently reframing 'I know it's easier to give ourselves a hard time, but is there a kinder way to talk to yourself?' For more information, see the Body Kind Families video series on [self-compassion](#) and [body appreciation](#).
- Your teen, yourself or other family members may like to complete some [Self-compassion meditations and exercises](#), from Kristen Neff (who is a guru of self-compassion).

Negative self-talk?

As a parent it can be particularly challenging to hear your teen talk badly about themselves.

Help your teen to practice responding to challenging appearance thoughts with a kind rather than critical voice.

Step 1: Feel the Feeling - what feelings are behind this?

Step 2: Recognise the Reality - many people struggle with this.

Step 3: Choose Kindness - what would a kind friend say?

Encourage them to do positive things they enjoy (writing, art, music, gentle movement) to manage negative self-talk.

Concerned about someone?

Butterfly's free and confidential National Helpline can support you.

Phone Email Webchat
1800 33 4673 (1800 EDHOPE)
www.butterflynationalhelpline.org.au

How to help your teen manage Appearance Based Teasing

Appearance and weight based teasing can lead to a significant and long-term impact on body image and self-esteem and is a risk factor for the development of eating disorders and other mental health issues. It does not need to be explicit and targeted bullying to be a problem.

Any negative comment, even those made in affection in a family or even just 'banter' is enough to impact the way someone feels about their body and appearance – in the moment and throughout life.

Adopting a zero-tolerance approach

Keeping the lines of communication open with teens is important so navigating a zero-tolerance approach to appearance teasing / bullying needs to be considered in a way that works for your family. If appearance teasing and talk is common practice amongst your family, it may take some time to change things.

Calling it out is one way to start and what your teen sees and hears at home, is what they will pay forward in the world.

Tips for Parents/Caregivers

How to handle appearance banter or teasing in the home.

- It can be hard to know what to say in the moment, so have some responses, ready to go. Here are some suggestions but find a form of words that works for you!
 - 'You might have been trying to be funny, but people's bodies are not to be joked about'
 - 'Teasing people for how they look, really can damage how they feel about their body'
 - 'Their body is not the problem, the way you are talking about it is'
 - 'Let's find another nickname that's not about appearance'
 - 'Can we be kind and avoid using names or nicknames that make fun of people'
- If it is an adult family member, have a quiet word to them and explain in a calm and neutral way why these types of comments are not OK. If they persist, take a more direct approach and ask them to not comment on your teen's or any family members appearance at all.

Frequently Asked Questions

For some tips on managing appearance related teasing at school/by peers and responding to a child who is above their healthy weight talking negatively about themselves, please visit the [FAQs](#) page.



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