

How to help teens celebrate and Appreciate All Bodies

Watch the accompanying video [here](#)



Learning to celebrate and accept all bodies can help reduce weight stigma, reduce appearance-based teasing and improve body image. This tip sheet aims to help you role model and encourage positive attitudes, respect and appreciation of all bodies.

Weight stigma (i.e. the belief that thinner bodies are better than larger bodies) is a very real issue in society and a significant risk factor for the development of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.



A healthy body can come in a variety of weight, shapes and sizes. If parents send the message that all bodies are good and that all bodies belong, in our world and especially in their home, children and teens are more likely to be more accepting of their own.

As a society it is important to broaden our understanding about weight and body size and work to reduce weight discrimination.

Being aware of our own personal weight biases, values and beliefs and actively challenging these is a great place to start!

Debunking some unhelpful *myths* about body size and weight

Myth 1:
Weight is a choice

Fact: Our body size is largely determined by genetics, along with over 100 contributing factors. Typically, people focus on 2 factors – food and exercise.

Myth 2:
Weight can be controlled

Fact: Our body is programmed to 'survive' and resist weight loss. The majority of people who diet will regain the weight lost. Diet culture profits from convincing us that with enough 'willpower' and 'discipline' we can change our body size and weight permanently.

Myth 3:
BMI is a good measure of health

Fact: Body Mass Index (BMI) is not an accurate measure of a person's over-all health, particularly in adolescents. BMI doesn't differentiate between fat and muscle and also doesn't consider health behaviours (which improve health but may not change weight).

Myth 4:
Weight = Worth

Fact: Numbers and metrics do not determine a person's worth (which includes numbers of 'likes' and 'followers' too). All humans, of all shapes, sizes and in all bodies are deserving of respect, kindness, support and love.

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 teens celebrate and appreciate ALL bodies cont.

THINGS TO *Do*

- Role model positive, accepting or neutral attitudes towards all bodies. Be Body *Kind*!
- Be aware of your own weight attitudes and biases and who and what has influenced them.
- Learn more about [Health Not Weight](#)
- Encourage your family to accept and celebrate differences in bodies. Try diversifying social feeds to include people of all shapes and sizes and also those with visual differences.
- Speak kindly about all bodies (your own, others) with respect and as if it were your best friend.
- Call out jokes, banter, language and comments that tease, bully or shame a person's weight or size.
- Remind your teen that their bodies are growing and changing and that is natural and OK.
- Focus on how the body functions, not what it looks like and encourage your teen to see themselves as more than their body and appearance!
- Focus on improving the health behaviours of all your children.

THINGS TO *Avoid*

- Talking about weight, diets and/or using 'fat' in a negative, derogatory way.
- Making negative comments about people in larger bodies (e.g. suggesting they are unhealthy or need to lose weight). Health cannot always be seen.
- Dismissing disordered eating or eating disorder symptoms or behaviours in children in larger bodies. Eating disorders can develop in people of all weights.
- Passing judgement about a person's body size. So many other factors contribute to a person's size.
- Using terms like underweight, overweight or obese which imply a body size might be 'wrong'. If you must label, try higher weight or larger bodied.
- Treating a higher weight teen in a different way to others in the family (e.g. different meals/portion sizes).



Research reports that using weight or size to motivate a change in health behaviours (or to encourage weight loss) does not work.

Research also reports that weight and body shaming increases body dissatisfaction and unhelpful behaviours and impacts on self-esteem.

Concerned about a Teen?

If you are concerned about your teen's developing body (or body size) it is recommended that you seek the support of non-diet, or weight-inclusive health professionals. To find a non-diet/weight-inclusive health professional visit <https://haesaustaliainc.wildapricot.org/find-a-provider>.

These professionals also recommend that you do not take your teen (or child) to initial appointments as it is important that your teen is not made to feel that their body is 'wrong' or the problem', increasing feelings of shame. The [FAQ's](#) page and [What to do if Concerned](#) resources also provide further information.

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