

Understanding Body Image in Adolescents

As a parent/carer of a teenager you can still positively and significantly impact the relationship they have with their body, eating and exercise. This tip sheet helps you to better understand body image and how you can support the teen in your life to be Body *Kind*.

Watch the accompanying video [here](#)



Body image is the thoughts, feelings and attitudes we have about our bodies and how we look. Our body image influences our behaviours, both positively and negatively.

It is common for adolescents to feel different things about their body and appearance; sometimes satisfied or dissatisfied, sometimes neutral.

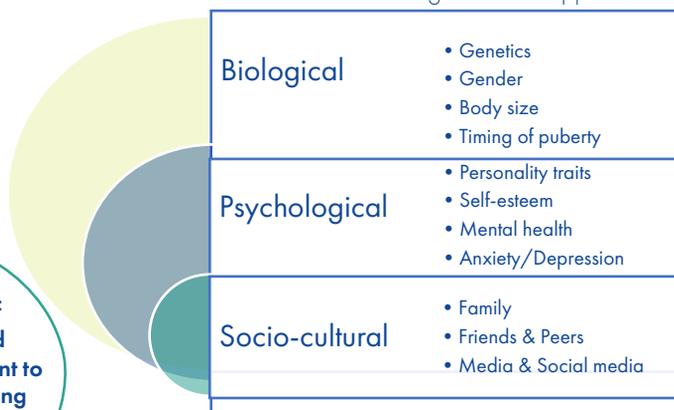
A positive body image supports physical and mental health and can protect against eating disorders and other mental health problems.

A poor body image can impact negatively on studies, relationships, exercise behaviours, self-esteem, risk taking behaviours (alcohol, tobacco and early first sexual intercourse) and can contribute to disordered eating and eating disorders.

60 - 80% of children and adolescents want to change something about the way they look.

What influences body image?

Body image is influenced by many individual and environmental factors, including the people in our lives and society's messages around appearance.



Body *Kind* Role Modelling Tips

Parents are a significant influence on their teen's body image.

Be a Body *Kind* role model by:

- Speaking kindly about your own bodies and all bodies
 - Moving your body for health and wellbeing (instead of weight, body shape or muscle size)
 - Expressing gratitude for what your body has done for you and what it can do
 - Being aware of weight and appearance biases and challenging these
 - Practicing self-compassion and self-care in a way that works for you
 - Celebrating differences and non-appearance based qualities and achievements.
- Help your teen to admire non-appearance based qualities and strengths in others.
 - Embrace your teen's changing body and do your very best not to comment on their weight or body shape changes.
 - All bodies are different, support your teen to accept their body more and compare less.
 - Help your teen be body confident and kind on social media (see this [Tip Sheet](#) for more information).
 - Try to stay connected to your teenagers and understand their reality. Who and what is influencing their values and attitudes towards appearance, eating and physical activity?
 - Keep communication lines open and be available to talk when they are. Share appropriate experiences from when you were a teen to help relate and connect. Check out the '[Let's Talk.... Being Body *Kind* Discussion Cards](#)' to help with this.

Being a Body *Kind* Role Model, is not always easy.

Your own body image has been influenced by many things; life experiences, other people and societal body ideals (at every age).

It's never too late to heal your own relationship with your body and striving to do so is a really positive step for yourself and your family.

Seek support early if concerned.

Eating disorders are complex mental and physical illnesses. Despite best parenting efforts, serious eating and body image issues do develop. For more information see the video and tip sheet '[What to do if you are concerned](#)'

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