

## HELPING CHILDREN TO DEVELOP A HEALTHY BODY IMAGE AND POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem and body image are closely related. Parents and caregivers play a big role in helping children develop a healthy body image and positive self-esteem.

Body image is based on how we feel about our bodies, as well as how we feel in our bodies. Body image is developed based on the messages we receive from our self and others. What we see and hear, what is said to and about us, how we are treated, what we tell ourselves about how we look and about the kind of person we are, all shape our body image.

Self-esteem is how much we value ourselves. Children and adults who have positive self-esteem are more resilient and are less influenced by negative outside influences, tend to feel more secure and are more likely to be successful in life.

Ultimately, body image and self-esteem are what we “see” when we look in the mirror and how much we value who we are.

You can help your child develop a healthy body image and positive self-esteem by:

- ◆ Giving children tasks that they can do and will feel good about completing.
- ◆ Encouraging children to set small doable goals; celebrate successes when goals met.
- ◆ Allowing children to try different things until they find something they enjoy.
- ◆ Including children in decision-making to help build their confidence.
- ◆ Finding positive things to say about your child; make positive comments about yourself.
- ◆ Avoiding making comments about your child’s appearance. Too many positive comments puts too much emphasis on appearance.
- ◆ Never telling children they should lose weight or go on a diet. Don’t diet yourself.
- ◆ Letting children know you love them just the way they are. Role model self-love and acceptance.
- ◆ Helping children identify and express uncomfortable feelings like sadness and anger, and listening to them without judgement. Being unable to express uncomfortable feelings can lead to negative ways of coping such as smoking, drugs or alcohol, or over and under eating. Role model expressing your feelings and demonstrating healthy coping strategies.
- ◆ Encouraging children to state their opinions, to ask for what they need and to listen to their “gut” feelings. This gives children confidence.
- ◆ Becoming media savvy. Be aware of the negative effects that media can have on how children and adults think and feel about themselves and others.

The most important thing you can do for your child is to role model all of the above behaviours yourself. If you feel good about yourself, your children are more likely to feel good about themselves.

For more information contact:

- ◆ Media Kids [www.media-awareness.ca](http://www.media-awareness.ca)