

Supporting your Child's Mental Wellness: Body Image

Over the past several years, more children and youth are showing signs of an eating disorder and body dissatisfaction¹.

¹(Youth Development Index, 2023)

Children of all genders are affected by concerns about their body image.

What influences a child's body image?

We all have views about body image and food choices because of the messages we receive throughout our lives. Parents and caregivers play an important role in building an environment where children and youth feel confident and empowered².

Children develop their body image through²:

- Messages and images in the **media** about beauty and body size ideals.
- **Comments your child hears** about their body (including weight-based bullying)
- **How adults talk** about food, exercise, their own bodies and the bodies of others.

²(Embody)



Did you know?

Disordered eating behaviours can negatively impact your child's health and may lead to poor bone health, issues with digestion, difficulty concentrating, increased anxiety and depression, and isolation from friends and family. On the next page are tips to **help your child develop a healthy relationship with food and body.**

If you are **concerned about your child's body image**, please reach out to [Kelty Mental Health](#) or [Embody](#)



Help your child develop a healthy relationship with food and body^{2,3}.

³(Ontario Dietitians in Public Health)

Use food neutral language and call food by its name (e.g. “candy”).

Avoid labeling foods as “good”, “bad”, “healthy”, “unhealthy”, or “junk food”.

These words may lead to body image concerns, dieting, feeling shame or guilt around eating, or other eating problems.

Eat meals in common spaces and together when possible.

Eating with others without distractions is a great way to connect as a family.

It can even help protect adolescents from disordered eating and can improve your child's self-esteem and school success.

Be a positive role model

Avoid criticizing your own body shape or appearance in front of your child.

Show your child that you eat and enjoy a variety of foods. Talk about physical activity in a positive way. Avoid using physical activity as a punishment for eating too much.

Respect all kinds of bodies

Body diversity is healthy and normal, and a person's health and worth are not determined by their size.

Instead of focusing on shape and weight, focus on what makes a healthy body, such as getting adequate food, water, physical activity, and sleep.

Rethink compliments

When talking about your body or your child's body, focus on what your body can do instead of how it looks.

Focus compliments to your child or others on their unique qualities, abilities, or effort.

Support them during puberty

Puberty is a time when significant changes happen as youth transition to adults.

During puberty, acne and increases in weight, height, body size are natural and expected.

Teach your children to be critical of media

Talk about how media, including social media, can impact our body image.

- Assess and talk about how films, books and TV shows do or don't reinforce positive body image
- Talk about how pictures do not always depict reality, can be edited or altered with AI, and how this can make us feel about our bodies. Diet products (e.g., 'weight loss' teas) and videos about what influencers or celebrities “eat in a day” are common on social media and can affect our body image. For more tips, take a look at Embody's [media guide](#) for caregivers and infosheet on [social media influencers and diet trends](#).

