

7 Ways to Help Yourself or a Friend with Body Image Issues

1. **Avoid making physical, external appearances a big issue.**

This can take many forms: don't make critical comments about food, weight or looks; stop comparing yourself to airbrushed models and actors; don't engage in negative or berating talk about your body or anyone else's – even in your head.

2. **Focus on your positive qualities:**

The things you like about yourself and others, both inside and out. You aren't a collection of body parts; you're a whole person. What you think about, expands! This can help build up our resilience.

3. **Set healthy goals:**

For overall body health, not specific weight loss or muscle gain. Instead of focusing on slimming or bulking up as a goal (which can become a dangerous obsession) focus on the benefits of healthy eating and exercise, like better sleep, more energy, clearer skin, reduced anxiety, etc.

4. **Don't diet.**

Dieting often sets up a very unhealthy cycle of deprivation followed by bingeing and all the attendant feelings of guilt and remorse, and dieting is the biggest risk factor for developing an eating disorder. Instead of dieting, cut back on processed foods and try to keep engaged in fun hobbies that keep you physically active.

5. **Do talk about feelings.**

Kids who feel safe to talk honestly about how they feel about their body without being judged or dismissed are less likely to bottle up unhealthy feelings and start taking unhealthy actions.

6. **Love your own body.**

We all send unconscious messages out there to those around us, so if someone you know is struggling with body image, they may be looking to you for cues. Say good things about your body and show how you care for it.

7. **Recognize that symptoms may really be about something else.**

Eating disorders are often related to emotional issues like low self-esteem, stress, abuse, grief, loss, or feelings of helplessness. Controlling what you eat may temporarily mask these other issues, but eventually you will need to deal with the underlying issues. Sometimes talking to someone who has recovered from an eating disorder, or to a counselor or doctor, can be very helpful in managing the feelings that can lead to a negative body image.

If you or someone you know needs more help with body image issues, please see the next page for ways to access Mental Health resources.