



Body image

Ages 11-12

WHAT IS YOUR CHILD GOING THROUGH?

The image that young people have of their bodies can change greatly at the start of adolescence. Why?

- Puberty causes physical changes that influence how young people perceive their bodies.
- These changes, which don't occur at the same pace for everyone, can be difficult for people who get a sense of security from being "like everyone else."
- Young people want to look good, please other people and be popular. They can be concerned about their appearance. They are at an age when they are sensitive about the image they project and comments from their friends and family members.
- Young people are influenced by models of men and women in the media (advertising, TV, music, movies, magazines, video games and the Internet). These models, which are often stereotyped and unrealistic, can cause young people to develop a negative self-perception.

Things that kids might be wondering

- Is it normal that I feel uncomfortable in my body?
- Why do my girlfriends have breasts and I don't?
- Will I always be the smallest one in my class?
- How can I lose weight?
- How can I be more muscular?

Kids' Space

Write down a question you would like to ask your parents or write what you learned about this topic at school:

Dissatisfaction with their bodies

At the age of nine, nearly one young person out of ten is dissatisfied with his or her body. This dissatisfaction tends to increase in adolescence.

In girls: A normal increase in fat tissue at puberty (thighs, hips, breasts, buttocks, stomach) can mean having a body that is far from society's thin ideal. Girls are therefore more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies and appearance and are more likely to try different things to live up to this ideal.

In boys: Puberty-related body changes (e.g., growth spurts, muscle development, widening of the shoulders), especially when they happen early, give boys an advantage. When these changes happen later, boys can experience dissatisfaction with their bodies.

Body image is... how you see your body, how you feel about your body, and how you think other people perceive you.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A PARENT?

Reflect and act on the things that can influence your child's body image

Does your child get negative comments from other people about her body and appearance?

- If yes, how does she feel? How does she react?
- How do you react when you hear this type of comment?
- How can you help her deal with these issues?

Does your child have good self-esteem?

- Can he recognize his qualities and talents?
- Do you frequently compliment your child on his strengths, accomplishments and hard work?

What are your family attitudes about body image and appearance?

- Do you have a positive or negative attitude about your appearance or your child's appearance?
- Do you constantly express concerns about your weight and appearance in front of your child and family?
- Do you believe that healthy people come in different shapes and sizes?

Who are the models of boys and girls that your child is exposed to in the media?

- Does your child want to be like these celebrities?
- What does he like about these people? Does she think that the media influences her image? How?

Tips

Tell your child on a regular basis what makes her unique: You are extraordinary because....; I admire the way you reacted in this situation....; I'm proud of you because... This shows that you value your child for reasons other than her appearance.

Boys also worry about their bodies and their appearance. Pay attention to their concerns, which may be expressed through certain kinds of behaviour (isolation, exercising, how they eat).

Set an example for your child with what you say and do. This doesn't mean you have to be perfect or always feel good in your own skin; it just means being aware of the messages you are sending your child about his or her appearance and the appearance of other people.

WHAT CAN HELP YOU?

Family movie

Diary of a Wimpy Kid (2010, 20th Century Fox)

A young boy who wants to be popular comes up with a number of schemes to win over his classmates, each of which backfire.

Book and brochure

GAGNIER, Nadia. *Miroir, miroir... je n'aime pas mon corps*, Les Éditions La Presse, 2010.

Votre influence a du poids. L'image corporelle à l'adolescence. Available from the website www.equilibre.ca from the "Outils et publications" section. (In French only.)

Do you need a professional resource?

Call Info-Santé at 811 or the parent help line at 1-800-361-5085.

Author: Geneviève Gagnon, Direction de santé publique de l'Agence de Lanaudière

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