



# Establishing a healthy body image in kids

Do's and Don'ts for  
parents and caregivers

# Introduction

**3 kids -- Adelyn (6th) , Blaine (4th) and Isaac (2nd)**

Own and operate Live Well Therapy. Specialize in eating disorder recovery, body image issues, trauma, anxiety, depression

Book coming out 2025 on body image restoration for adults!



# Today's Agenda

1

Learn about body image  
(3 central tenants that create our  
construct)

3

What do we need to avoid ?

2

What can we give our kids to help?

4

Key Take Aways and Questions



# Body Image!

A person's subjective picture  
or mental image of their  
own body

# Composed of 3 main things

- 1 societal and cultural messages
- 2 mental health and mental health needs
- 3 family structures and genetics

what was your  
experience growing up?



what were told  
about your body?

what were you  
told about others'  
bodies?

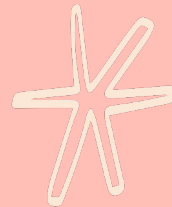
what made a  
'good' body?



# societal and cultural messages



**we are conditioned by society, the media, the cultural norms of the time to understand what is a good body vs what is a bad body**



**1**

ideal body types shift and change in time

**2**

our children are being conditioned to understand what a good body is in the wake of filters/AI/and photo shop

**3**

now more than ever we have conflicting ideas about what is health

**4**

racism and power dynamics play a key role in cultural body image ideals

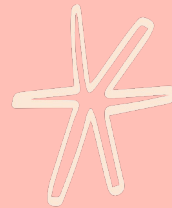


# mental health and mental health needs



**co-occurrence regarding mental health needs and body image issues.**

**poor experiences of ones' body can create higher anxiety (one study even indicated 30-40% more likely to experience self-hatred)**



**1**

comorbidity with eating disorder issues

**2**

traumatic experiences, anxiety, ocd, and depression can all interrupt our children's ability to feel confident in their body

**3**

in a world where so many things are out of control mental health wise, our kids are susceptible to using their body as a way of trying to gain control

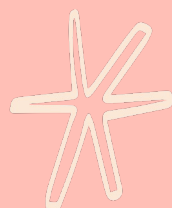


# family influence and genetics



it's important to understand both the learned and genetically inherited issues related to poor body image

“Genetics loads the gun, environment pulls the trigger”



1

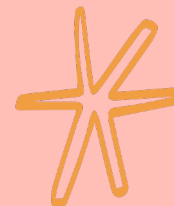
our kids are learning how to relate to their bodies from us

2

genetically, some bodies are predisposed to be larger, some are predisposed to be smaller.

3

those that have family members w/ ED's are 11-12 times more likely to develop issues as well





# Body Image : surface to something deeper

1

Tangible way to express  
complex feelings

3

Mirrors etc

2

Numbers/weights creates  
false sense of control

4

distinction w/ Body Dysmorphia

# Research on children & body image

1

Stats on children and body image

Kids aged 13–19,  
35% said their  
body image  
causes them to  
'often' or 'always'  
worry.

Children as  
young as 3 can  
have body image  
issues

Girls have higher  
probability of  
experiencing  
poor body image

2

Research indicates that  
children w/poor body image  
also have a more difficult time  
engaging in healthy activities

# my kid made a negative body comment, how do I respond?



1

**Validate:** I hear you're feeling upset. I understand that it's feeling difficult to be in your body.

2

**Investigate:** Where have you heard these messages about your body? Have there been places or people that have said these types of things?

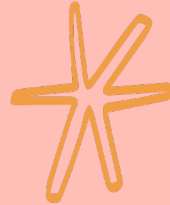
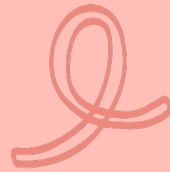
3

**Refute:** It's so important to understand that bodies come in all shapes and sizes. My body is unique, so is yours.



As parents/caregivers we have a role to play in helping our kids both take in positive messages and challenge negative messages from our culture.

Specifically these responses as well as the "do's and don'ts" help us answer and guide input for the 3 different areas which form body image



challenge other's comments  
about bodies and sizes

validate their experiences of  
their bodies

watch what we say about our  
own bodies

teach body diversity &  
challenge your own  
fat phobia



Do's



watch what we say  
about others' bodies

for instilling body  
connection for our  
children

teach them media  
intelligence

teach the dangers of  
dieting

respect their physical  
boundaries

comment on how their body  
functions for them

practice intuitive eating  
principles

shy away from questions about your own body or how bodies work

have expectations about how your child's body SHOULD look

demonize one food over the other

use code names for body parts

Don'ts

over control their food intake

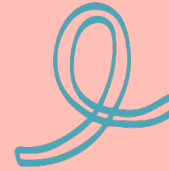
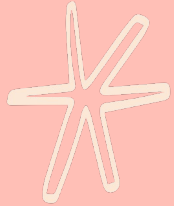
make comments about how their body looks/presents

for instilling body connection for our children

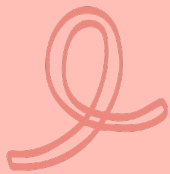
force exercise

have them use calorie counters or fitness trackers

focus on weights and numbers



Bodies come in all shapes & sizes.  
Bodies are diverse.  
All bodies are good bodies.



# embodiment

what we want for our kids is to be able to be **CONNECTED** to their bodies. to be inside their bodies, not separated

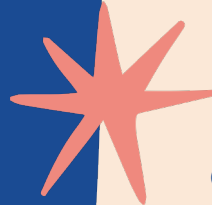
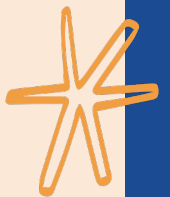
- 1 that their mind and body act as one
- 2 that they not only communicate w/ their body but know their bodies
- 3 this begins with teaching them to respect their bodies
- 4 and that respects starts with us teaching and modeling for them

Parents have a key part to play in creating this.



**"...In order for a person to develop their own inner trust, body appreciation, self-care, and self-compassion, they need to have received it from a reliable caregiver and had their needs met from an early age.**

**Otherwise, in order to heal their relationship with food (and body) they will need to repair and revisit what was not established previously.... "**



*How to Raise an Intuitive Eater*

# body image Summary

Do the best you can until  
you know better. When you  
know better, do better" –  
Maya Angelou

body image is anything  
but stagnant throughout  
time.

it is constructed over a  
series of messages and  
events taken in  
throughout life

we have an active role  
to play in helping our  
child develop a healthy  
relationship to their  
body

childhood is a  
particularly vulnerable  
time for development

we can't control all of  
the information our  
children take in but  
we can help them  
understand and  
respond appropriately

and here's the relieving  
news....

we don't have to be  
perfect parents!  
get it right 30-50% of  
the time  
"good enough"  
parenting





# Resources

## For Parents

- How to Raise An Intuitive Eater by Sumner Brooks & Ameer Sevenson
- Fat Talk: Parenting in the Age of Diet Culture by Virginia Sole-Smith
- Raising Body Positive Teens by Signan Darpinian et al
- Cinderella Ate My Daughter by Peggy Orenstein

## For Kids/Teens

- Grow Up and Love Your Body by Sarah Weston
- The Body Image Book for Girls by Charlotte Markey
- Bodies are Cool by Tyler Feder
- Embrace Your Body by Taryn Brumfitt