



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH FOOD AND BODY IMAGE

In today's culture, it has become almost second nature to talk about weight - whether it's losing a few kilos for a special event, dieting to "feel better," or comparing body shapes and sizes. While these conversations may seem harmless, we often forget that our children are listening closely. They are learning from us what is considered "normal," and they are also observing how we speak about our own bodies.

This influence is magnified by the curated images children encounter online and in the media. Social platforms are filled with carefully edited photos of people with seemingly perfect bodies and lives. For young people, the pressure to measure up to these unrealistic standards can be overwhelming.

It is increasingly common for adolescents to turn to online sources for advice on dieting, fitness, or quick-fix solutions to change their bodies. While some of this guidance may appear harmless, the real concern arises when weight loss is met with overwhelming praise. Compliments like "You look amazing" or "You've lost so much weight" can unintentionally reinforce the idea that being thinner equals being more valued. This can draw young people into a cycle that may start with disordered eating and, in some cases, progress into a serious eating disorder.

What Can Parents Do?

As parents, one of the most powerful tools we have is role modelling. Ask yourself: Would I be comfortable if my child copied the way I talk about my body, my eating habits, or my relationship with food? If the answer is no, this may be a helpful cue to rethink the example being set.

Here are some practical ways to support children in developing a healthy body image and balanced relationship with food:

- - **Model positive self-talk:** Speak kindly about your own body and avoid negative comments about weight - your own or others'.
- - **Focus on health, not appearance:** Emphasise feeling strong, energetic, and healthy over striving for a certain body shape.
- - **Encourage balance with food:** Promote eating a variety of foods without labelling them as "good" or "bad." All foods can fit into a healthy lifestyle.
- - **Celebrate effort and character, not looks:** Compliment children on their kindness, persistence, creativity, and other qualities that aren't tied to appearance.
- - **Teach media literacy:** Help young people understand that many online images are filtered, edited, or staged, and don't reflect real life.
- - **Keep communication open:** Create a safe space for children to share their feelings about body image and food without judgment.

By being intentional about the language we use and the behaviours we model, parents can nurture a culture of self-acceptance and resilience in their children. In doing so, we give them the tools to build a lifelong, healthy relationship with both food and their bodies.

If you wish to read more on this topic, visit SchoolTV

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