Developing a Positive Body-Image

**Body Image: Everyone's Body is Shaped Differently**
When you look in the mirror, how do you view yourself? How do you picture yourself in your mind? Do you feel comfortable with your body shape, or do you feel self-conscious about the way your body looks? Body image is the mental representation you create for yourself, but it may or may not bear any relation to how you actually appear. The way you feel about your body is your affective body image. This relates to the amount of satisfaction or dissatisfaction you feel about your shape, weight and individual body parts.

People can weigh exactly the same but have a completely different body shape. Your genes are unique and determine your body shape: your height, muscle and bone structure – and it can’t be changed. Be proud of your body and all the wonderful things it allows you to do! Enjoy the body you have and do not beat yourself up over changes that happen naturally due to aging, pregnancy, or lifestyle choices.

**Society and Your View on Body Image:**
Society shapes us in many ways, possibly more than we realize – from our interactions, to our personal growth, from others’ perception of our bodies as a reflection of our own self-worth. Our body image and the way we see ourselves can be influenced by lots of things. In particular, the media has increasingly become a platform that reinforces cultural beliefs and projects strong views on how we should look, that we, as individuals, often unknowingly or knowingly validate and reinforce. The more we look at perfect images of others and then look to find those same idealized characteristics in ourselves and don’t find them, the worse we feel about ourselves. For instance, magazines often show photos of people who have a body shape that is unrealistic for any people. Photos of celebrities in magazines often involve hours of hair and make-up styling by professionals and they are usually digitally altered to make them look ‘better’, for example, by smoothing out lines, removing blemishes, or changing body shape.

**A Negative Body Image:**
A negative body image involves being overly focused on comparing your size, shape, or appearance to others or unrealistic standards. Holding yourself to a thin-ideal or an athletic-ideal may cause you to develop unhealthy self-talk, low self-esteem, or disordered eating patterns, such as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). To learn more, check out the National Eating Disorder website on body image and eating disorders.

Know that loving yourself starts with liking yourself, which starts with respecting yourself, which starts with thinking of yourself in positive ways. Be sure to show yourself love today and every day.

**Body Positivity:**
Having a healthy body image is important because it can affect your self-esteem, self-acceptance and your attitude towards food and exercise. Here are some ways from the National Eating Disorder
Association (NEDA) to help improve your body image. Also check out this article from a licensed counselor for reasons why you should be proud of yourself both inside and out.

Promoting a Positive Body Image in Society:

- **Listen for and challenge body shame talk.** When you hear other people talking badly about their own body, or other’s bodies, reinforce them that their body is strong, unique, and awesome.

- **Notice any of your own negative body talk.** Make a pact with a friend or family member to stop talking negatively about your own or other’s bodies and become aware of how you may talk about your own and other’s bodies.

- **Start a “body acceptance” campaign or project.** Put up positive body image quotes on Post-It notes in your home, school, campus, workplace, or town as a reminder to love and appreciate your body or other’s bodies.

- **Raise awareness.** Read and share resources about media literacy, body diversity, body positivity, and Health at Every Size (HAES).