

# Supporting a Young Person with Body Image

Body image is what we think about our body and how we think others perceive it. Positive body image is when we feel happy and relaxed about our body, whereas negative body image is when we think our body isn't good enough. People who lack body confidence are more likely to be less confident in general, less physically healthy and more at risk of developing mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and/or eating disorders.

## Statistics:

Most of us can probably identify something we would like to change about the way we look. Both boys and girls can worry about their body image. The Be Real Campaign reports that 52% of students aged 11 to 16 years old often worry about the way they look.

## 10 TOP TIPS for supporting a young person with body image:

- 1 Explore ideas of body image.** Remind the young person that there is no perfect, ideal body, and that body image differs across culture and time. We are all unique.
- 2 Be aware of media.** Images in the media are often edited and unrealistic, explore this with the young person. Remind them to try not to compare themselves with others.
- 3 Encourage talking.** Try not to pressure the young person, but let them know talking can help and that you are there for them. Encourage them to talk to their family too.
- 4 Listen.** You don't need to know the answers, sometimes listening is enough. By summarising, clarifying and asking questions you can explore what might help together.
- 5 Challenge automatic thoughts.** Help them consider negative and self-critical thoughts in more helpful perspectives. It might help to ask what they would say to a friend.
- 6 We are more than our looks.** Help them to identify their strengths and value themselves by more than their looks. Our bodies help us to do amazing things, celebrate this.
- 7 Practise positive thinking.** Encourage the young person to identify things that have went well and things they are grateful for. This will help to reduce negative thinking.
- 8 Consider general wellbeing.** Sleeping well, a healthy diet, exercising and spending time with others benefits our mental health. Explore if the young person can improve on these.
- 9 Lead by example.** Focus on behaviour and personality as well as appearance when interacting with others. Being kind to others benefits your mental health too.
- 10 Look after yourself.** Supporting others is hard work, try to look after yourself too. Support the young person to also talk to their family, GP and/or school. If you are concerned seek additional help.

## Self-help links:

- [www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/risks-and-protective-factors/lifestyle-factors/body-image/](http://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/risks-and-protective-factors/lifestyle-factors/body-image/)
- [www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/body-image/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/body-image/)
- [www.themix.org.uk/mental-health/body-image-and-self-esteem](http://www.themix.org.uk/mental-health/body-image-and-self-esteem)
- [www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/you-your-body/my-body/how-you-look/](http://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/you-your-body/my-body/how-you-look/)
- [www.dove.com/uk/dove-self-esteem-project.html](http://www.dove.com/uk/dove-self-esteem-project.html)
- [www.berealcampaign.co.uk/](http://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/)

