

GRADES  
4-5

## Confronting Comparisons to Build Body Confidence

### BODY TALK IN THE HOME

#### Timing

20 minutes

#### Materials

- **Body Talk** Family Handout
- Paper
- Pens or pencils
- Mirror(s)

#### Did You Know?

Body image can be defined as a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to appearance. In other words, body image is how we view our bodies.<sup>1</sup> Many things can affect body image, including family, friends, and the media. Research has found that comments about size, weight, and shape from parents and family influence body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction is linked to low self-esteem and eating disorders.<sup>2</sup>

Parents can help support their children by providing positive statements to celebrate the uniqueness of each person's body. Parents can also model body positivity and acceptance in the home by avoiding negative comments about their own bodies.

#### Activity Overview

In this activity, parents will read a **Body Talk** family handout which discusses how adults' language about their own bodies can affect their children. Each family member will then create a list of things that they like about their appearance and personality, and share their ideas. Finally, each family member will pledge to use these positive statements in a "mirror exercise." Afterwards, family members can share how they felt after completing this exercise.

<sup>1</sup> Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990; Cash & Smolak, 2011

<sup>2</sup> Evans et al., 2012

## Learn & Grow Together

### Discuss

With your family, discuss the ways body type and appearance are referenced in your home. How does each family member talk about his or her own body? How do the other members of the family feel when they hear one person talk negatively about his or her own body? How does each person talk about the bodies of others? It may be useful to incorporate some “I statements” to clearly express feelings and allow for open conversation between children and parents. For example, “I feel self-conscious when you say you look fat because it makes me think about whether or not I look fat,” or “It makes me feel uncomfortable when you say I look too skinny because I want to be healthy and health doesn’t have to do with my weight or shape.”



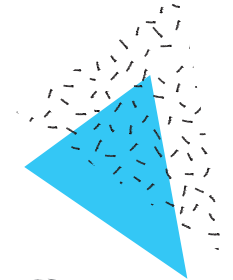
### Do

- Before completing this activity with your children, read the **Body Talk** family handout and think about how often you mention your body shape or make negative comments about your own body.
- Begin the family activity by making an intentional statement such as: “I realized we’ve been spending a lot of time talking about each other’s appearance lately, and I want to try something a little different,” or “I didn’t understand how much my negative body talk was affecting you, and I want to make things better in our home by talking about other things.”
- Challenge every person in the family to write three things they like about the way they look and three things they like about their personality on a sheet of paper.
- Every day, family members should say their lists out loud to themselves while looking in the mirror.
- After one week, meet to discuss how everyone felt when acknowledging the positive things about themselves. Did their feelings change as the week went on? Has focusing on the good helped them feel better about themselves?

## Body Talk: The Power of Words for a Positive Body Image<sup>3</sup>

Talking about our bodies is very common in our society—many of us do it constantly and automatically: “I feel fat in these jeans,” “I’ve put on so much weight,” or “Gosh, my skin looks awful today.” Talking about your looks might seem like a way to bond with your child and friends, but it’s worth considering what effect it could have.

Use the following action checklist to stop the ‘body talk’ and start a new kind of conversation for a positive body image—yours, your friends’ and your child’s.



### Teach Your Child to Talk Positively About His/Her Body

If you’re not guilty of these kinds of put-me-downs, then you’re in the minority. A study of female college students found that 93% engaged in this type of talk—dubbed “fat talk”—and a third did so regularly. The study found those who complained about their weight more often were likely to have lower satisfaction with their bodies—irrespective of their actual size.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, a study on college men published by Body Image, found that men frequently engage in “fat talk” as well. Those that engage in “fat talk” and men who hear conversations with “fat talk” have more eating disorder symptoms and appearance dissatisfaction.<sup>5</sup>

When we talk in this way, our children pick up on it. It may seem to them that physical appearance is how people judge and value themselves and one another. *Is this how we want our children to evaluate themselves?*

“Words can have a huge impact on our self-esteem, and constantly talking negatively about our bodies can reinforce the idea that there is only one type of body shape that is beautiful,” explains Jess Weiner. “It’s a pattern we have to break if we want our [children] to grow up to be confident about the bodies they’ve got.”



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dove.com/uk/dove-self-esteem-project/help-for-parents/talking-about-appearance/body-talk-the-power-of-words-for-a-positive-body-image.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0361684310384107>

<sup>5</sup> Engeln, R., Sladek, M. R., & Waldron, H. (2013). Body talk among college men: Content, correlates,

## Aren't You Bored of All the Body Talk?

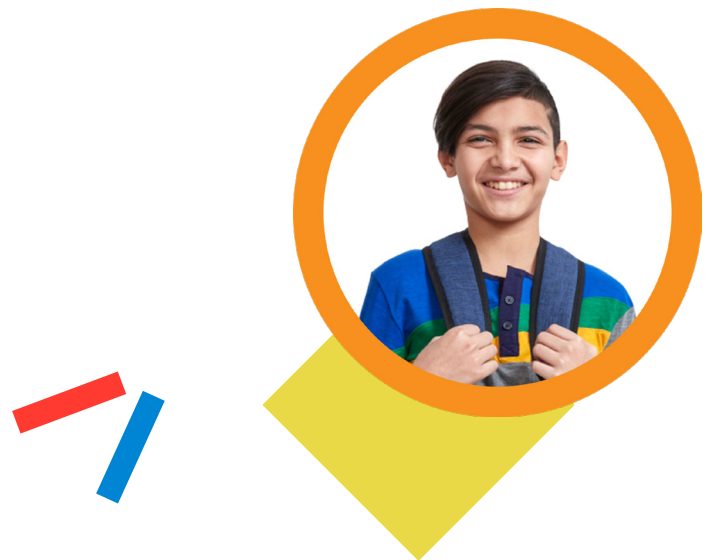
Body talk doesn't just refer to body-bashing. Talking about your appearance, even in a positive way, can contribute to low self-esteem by placing undue attention on certain physical features. By telling a friend they look great and following up with "Have you lost weight?", you're reinforcing the stereotypical view that a certain body shape or weight is beautiful.

By discussing your grueling exercise or diet regime or fluctuating weight, you're implying that weight is the primary factor in what it means to be fit and healthy.

## Less "Fat Talk," More Fun Talk!

Just three minutes of "fat talk" can lead to men and women feeling bad about their appearance and increase their body dissatisfaction, according to research.<sup>6</sup> Making the effort to cut it out should make you feel better about yourself. In turn, your child will pick up on the more positive language and be less likely to put him/herself down.

The words we use when talking about our bodies can damage our self-esteem, but they can also improve it. By focusing less on weight and body shape in your conversations, you can break the habit of reinforcing beauty stereotypes.



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<sup>6</sup> Adverse Effects of Social Pressure to be Thin on Young Women: An Experimental Investigation of the Effects of "Fat Talk". Published in the Journal of Eating Disorders. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/eat.10171>



## Action Checklist: How to Fight “Fat Talk” and Increase Self-Esteem

Try out Jess Weiner’s action checklist and see how much better you and your child can feel about yourselves.



### Remember: Your Words Have Power

Use your words to show your child there’s more to life than appearances. By making the change yourself, you’ll help him/her do the same and show your child that there’s more than one way to be beautiful.

#### Take the one-week challenge

Challenge yourself to a week of no body talk. It might be hard at first, but if you tell friends and family about it, they can support you and even try it for themselves.

#### Tell your friends you’re bored of body talk

Next time you meet up with a friend, if they start any body talk, reassure them but also alert them to the negative impact of their words—for example: “I adore you, and it hurts me to hear you talk about yourself that way.”

#### Focus on the fun talk

Avoid body talk when discussing diet and exercise, focusing instead on the emotional and health benefits. So, if your friend has started a new fitness regime, perhaps ask him/her whether he/she is feeling stronger or sleeping better.

#### Replace negatives with positives

If you start to fall into the ‘body talk trap’, try turning a negative into a positive. Think of a positive replacement statement for everything negative you might say about your or another’s appearance.

#### Love your body

The first step to building self-esteem and positive body confidence is to respect and appreciate your body. People who love their body and take care of it more live healthier lives regardless of their body shape and size. So, enjoy the things your body lets you do with your children—playing board games together, being outside and enjoying the weather, giving and receiving hugs, etc.

#### Tackle your harsh words about others

Stop making criticisms about other people’s weight or looks. Not only will your child subconsciously pick up this negative behavior, he/she will also interpret it to mean that they have to look a certain way for you to believe he/she is beautiful.