

Raising Resilient Children in a Body & Weight Obsessed World

1. **Parental Challenge:** *In our media driven world, parents feel that they do not have enough power to help their children feel good about their body image.*

ACTH Message: *Parents are extremely influential and have an important role in boosting their children's self-esteem and body-esteem. Research shows that compared to peers, the media, social networking and the advertising industry, parents continue to have significant influence.*

- According to current day research done by the Dove Self-Esteem Fund, when girls feel badly about themselves, 8 in 10 turn to their mothers, and 4 in 10 turn to their fathers to help them feel better. Girlfriends also play a significant role with half of all girls turning to their girlfriends.
 - When parents don't feel effective, they are apt to feel "out-of-control." In these circumstances, parents may be tempted to control their children's behavior (around food, exercise and clothing choices) as a way to alleviate worries and feelings of powerlessness.
 - **About Fathers:** Girls with high self-esteem are more likely to describe their fathers as: fun, smart, nice, happy, handsome, helpful, encouraging, successful, fair. Girls with low self-esteem are more likely to describe their fathers as: absent, controlling, angry, critical, mean, lonely, sad.
 - **About Mothers:** Girls with high self-esteem are more likely to describe their mothers as: nice, smart, fun, helpful, encouraging, happy, beautiful, fair, successful. Girls with low self-esteem are more likely to describe their mothers as: stressed, strict, controlling, critical, insecure, angry, sad, mean, lonely, absent, jealous.
2. **Parental Challenge:** *Parents, along with children, are influenced by the culture's idealization of the "ultra-thin" body type and its messages encouraging weight loss.*

ACTH Message: *The more our children worry about their weight and size, the more likely they are to develop disordered eating patterns and a negative body image. We encourage NO FAT TALK! Make your home a FAT TALK FREE ZONE! Parents need to learn about why DIETS DON'T Work, and how to promote non-critical ways of relating to one's body.*

- The research overwhelmingly shows that children engaged in negative self-talk, patterns of dieting and worry about their body or weight, grow up to be teens, and then adults, who hold heightened levels of anxiety about their appearance, shape, weight & food intake. They lack having enough of a healthy internal voice that promotes self-confidence and self-acceptance.
- Parents, as well as their children, have grown up with the idea that dieting is a logical solution to weight management. The statistics on dieting prove otherwise. 95% of people who lose weight through dieting regiments regain the weight plus more within a year or two. This causes increased feelings of defeat, self-criticism, disordered eating and anger at one's body. Consider that when we invest in dieting, it's comparable to investing in a television that only works 5% of the time.



- We need to protect our children from the harmful affects of FAT TALK because it breeds insecurity, anxiety and negative body image. Remember: 70% of body shape and size is determined by genetics; only 30 % is influenced by lifestyle. Growing children need help to accept their body shapes, medical conditions and athletic ability. We are all different and need to encourage children to appreciate themselves rather than try and change themselves.
- Push back against the billions of dollars spent by the diet industry encouraging us to buy into their messaging. Actively challenge the detrimental narrow view of what is acceptable. Our children suffer the consequences when we don't expand our own views of beauty and attractiveness. They need parents to explain how industries profit by encouraging all of us to feel badly about ourselves.
- Video's to view with your daughters and sons:
<https://secure.pursuantgroup.net/pursuant4/deltadeltadelta/fall08/dddselect/flashstory.asp>, Fat Talk Free Week - developed by Dr. Carolyn Becker, Associate Professor of Psychology at Trinity University, in conjunction with Tri Delta National Sorority. This video can be used to initiate a conversation about how "fat talk" has harmful effects on our self-esteem and body-esteem.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epOg1nWJ4T8>, Onslaught - developed by Dove.com
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFPGa0pKyTg>, Evolution- developed by Dove.com
 The Dove videos show how we are under the influence of advertising & the media.

3) Parental Challenge: *Parents are confused about what to say when faced with their children's body image struggles.*

ACTH Message: *When parents are caught off guard and don't know what to say, they need to slow down, take some time & think about the best way to respond.*

- Our words have impact on children, therefore, parents need to become aware of the possible ways their comments might make their kids feel (even though parents may not intend to impact their child in a particular way, their words have the potential to be negatively interpreted).
- Avoid responding when emotion is high. Taking time to think things through can give kids the message that they, too, can take time before reacting in situations.
- Family, friends and school personnel may inadvertently make comments that hurt and shame children. Parents need to speak to children in ways that help build coping skills for navigating the ups and downs in everyday life.

4) Parental Challenge: *We have all learned to be self critical; it seems easy and somewhat automatic to be hard on ourselves.*

ACTH Message: *Parents need to become aware of the many ways in which their actions, self-talk and attitudes could impact their children.*

- When parents are critical of their own eating habits, bodies, level of exercise (or lack of exercise), it leaves children more likely to be critical of themselves.
- Self-Esteem rises when one feels effective, and has the skills to work through challenging situations. Growing children feel good when they can regulate their emotions and handle stress.

5) Parental Challenge: *Parents are uncomfortable and lack confidence about what to do when their children are in distress.*

ACTH Message: *Parents need to resist the natural instinct to "fix" their children's distress. Children need to know that their parents trust their ability to figure things out.*

- It's difficult for parents to just listen and be with kids as they struggle. Children need to be heard and validated for what they are feeling. Parents would do well to recognize that doing this promotes resilience & builds self-esteem in their kids.

