



How to Raise a Healthy Child in Body and Mind

- ❖ ***Most parents have an incredible influence on their children's lives.***

Many studies show that parents often are identified as role models and the people children trust most to help them define their moral standards. Therefore, it is vitally important for parents to talk with their children about developing a healthy lifestyle.
- ❖ ***Be a positive role model.***

Children learn more through the actions of others than through words. Therefore, if you do not engage in unhealthy eating and exercise patterns, it is less likely your child will develop unhealthy eating and exercise habits.
- ❖ ***Accept your child's body size.***

Every child is born with a different genetic makeup, which means that every child is meant to look different. Do not try to change your child's body because you have expectations of how your child should look. Try not to compare your child's size to that of another sibling or his or her friends.
- ❖ ***Make your home environment a safe place to communicate.***

If your child feels he or she will be criticized for expressing feelings, he or she will be less likely to talk to you. Show that you are interested in what your child says by taking the time to stop what you are doing to really focus on your child.
- ❖ ***Talk with your child about the media and advertising.***

It is amazing how many children are unaware of the techniques, such as computer graphics, that are used to alter pictures in a magazine. Educate your child about the tricks in the modeling and advertising industries. Use television programs to talk about unrealistic body sizes and lifestyles.
- ❖ ***Make clear rules in your home about "body teasing."***

("Body teasing" is mocking someone because of the way he or she looks or feels.)
Often teasing starts out as a fun activity but it rarely ends up that way. Perhaps if every household enforced a no teasing rule there might be a lot less bullying in schools.
- ❖ ***Monitor your child's conversations with friends.***

If you find that you hear a lot of diet talk or body put downs, talk to your child about why this is happening and how this can spiral into lowered self-esteem and body image. Teach your child to be assertive and speak up when his/her friends start unhealthy talk. When your child's friends start talking badly about their bodies advise him or her to take action with words: (e.g., "Let's talk about something else." or "We spend a lot of time talking about this. Let's find other things to talk about.")
- ❖ ***Tell your child how you felt about your body growing up.***

Let your child know how you dealt with the thinness craze. Talk about the importance of building a strong mind and body. It is hard to have one without the other.

Prevention Tips for Parents

- ❖ Promote the diversity of all body types!!! Remind your child that everyone is born a different shape.
- ❖ Promote a positive self-esteem in your child. Tell your child often that you love him/her unconditionally. Tell your child you love him/her for who he/she is inside, not because of external appearances.
- ❖ Teach your child to be assertive – to ask for what he/she needs. Remember to model this behavior whenever possible. Discuss with your child the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness.
- ❖ Model healthy eating and exercise by eating a variety of different foods, listening to your own body's physical hunger, exercising for fun and not to "punish yourself for eating" and keeping active as a family. Make it fun!!!
- ❖ Talk to your child about the advertisements he/she sees in magazines, newspapers and on television, and the unrealistic messages they send. Tell your child these pictures go through a process called computer imaging and each picture is changed to achieve "perfection."
- ❖ Talk to your child about the genetic differences in body types. Go through a family photo album and look at the pictures of relatives in your own family. See and discuss the different body types of each family member. Ask your child to find the body type most like his/hers.

SOME DON'TS

- ❖ Don't ever use food as a reward or punishment. This will ultimately lead to control battles in the future regarding certain foods. In addition, if food is given as a reward/punishment, it ultimately is creating an emotional feeling to be associated with the food, i.e., "If I am good, I can eat ice cream, if I am bad, I do not get ice cream." Don't ever deprive a child of food because of behavior problems.
- ❖ Don't diet in your house. Model for your family that diets don't work, and they are associated with moodiness, binge eating, depression, fatigue, and ultimately long term weight gain.
- ❖ Do not ever limit your child's diet unless a physician says to for a specific health reason.
- ❖ Don't break food into "good" vs. "bad" categories. This will lead a child to ultimately equate what he/she eats, with who he/she is morally (i.e., "I've been so good lately. I've only eaten low fat foods, or I've been so bad lately, I've eaten all high fat foods.").
- ❖ Don't ever comment on your child's body shape or weight. Model this behavior by not commenting on anyone's body, i.e., friends, spouse, and television personalities. Don't ever compare your child's body to that of one of his/her friends. Remember everyone is different! Don't give your child the impression that one type of body is better than another.
- ❖ Don't continue the "myths" i.e., "the clean plate club" – let your child determine when he/she is physically full. Don't use guilt as a tactic to get your child to eat more, such as saying, "There are starving children in Bosnia."
- ❖ Don't use mealtimes to discuss unpleasant topics such as discipline problems, financial problems or other stressful issues. It is important to keep conversation during meals pleasant and relaxing.