LOW SELF-ESTEEM

NEGATIVE BODY IMAGE IN TEENS

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Introduction

Self-esteem directly affects the self-worth of a teen. A teenager's self-esteem is measured by how the teen feels about themselves and what they are worth. Self-esteem is also perceived, as teens will also determine how much others value them. While perceived value in the eyes of others may not always be accurate, this idea also contributes to a teenager's self-esteem.

Natural factors may influence a teen's self-esteem. These factors include:

- Body Type
- Height
- Weight
- Hair Style/Color
- Intelligence

While these factors are often beyond control of the teenager, they are nonetheless a part of their self-esteem development.

Body Image

Body image contributes to how a teen feels about themselves. As teens continue to grow and change during their pivotal teenage years, they can become self-conscious about their bodies. Many will also become overly aware of imperfections such as blemishes, pimples or extra weight.
Teens are constantly bombarded by the media's ideal body. These images are more often than not computer enhanced, giving unrealistic ideas of what a teenage body should look like. These messages often convince teens that they are too fat, too skinny, too tall, too short, etc.

Negative Body Image

Eating Disorder Hope defines body image as the way an individual sees themselves. When this image is distorted and unrealistic it is a negative body image. Like eating disorders, negative body image is most commonly found in women, however men can also suffer from negative body image. The formation of the perceptions of your body begin in early childhood as a child begins to determine their attractiveness, health, acceptability and functionality. Body image continues to form based on the feedback of others. Teens may receive this feedback from peers, family members, coaches, etc.

Personality traits and characteristics can also influence body images. Teens who are perfectionistic or self-critical in nature are more likely to develop a negative body image.

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What Influences a Teen's Self-Esteem?

There are a variety of external and internal influences that can sway and dictate the way a teen feels about their body.

Puberty & Development

Puberty is often a difficult time for teenagers. While everyone goes through puberty, not everyone goes through it in the exact same way at the exact same time. As a teen's body is changing, it is easy for them to become self-conscious. This time may skew their thinking and how they believe others perceive and view them. Physical changes, along with wanting to be loved and accepted by peers, makes puberty a trying time for many teenagers.

Media Images & Cultural Influences

While media was previously mentioned, it is worth mentioning again. Our culture is saturated with images and 'guidelines' for what is considered to be beautiful. If comparing themselves to celebrities and airbrushed magazine images, teens can suffer from self-esteem issues and doubt.

Family & School Environments

According to Kids Health, family members can affect their teens' body images, even without meaning to. Parents who struggle with their own body image may be leading by example. Family can also tend to be more forthright, asking questions like, "Why do you wear your hair like that? or "Can you find pants that fit you?" While these questions may be intended to help the teen make better choices about their appearance, they may be taken critically.

Coaches may be overly critical or put pressure on appearance, particularly for athletics where a weigh-in is required.

Teens may also encounter negative feedback and comments from peers in the classroom. Although these remarks are not always intended to be harmful, they can be damaging to a teen's body image during this volatile time.

Signs that a teenager may have an unhealthy or negative body image include:

- Obsessive use of the mirror
- Over amplifying blemishes and 'imperfections'
- Frequently thinking negatively about their body
- Comparing their body shape and size to others
- Envy of the body of a peer
- Envy of the body of a celebrity

How Teens Can Improve Body Image

While many teens believe that they need to change the way they look in order to feel good about themselves, this is not the case. There are constructive and positive ways that a teen can change their self-esteem and body image without drastically changing their body.

Changing Focus

A teen can improve their body image by shifting their focus. Instead of looking at what is wrong with their body, it is important for them to recognize and identify traits about themselves that are positive. Teens should shift their focus to being healthy, strong, and loving who they are.

Create Realistic Goals

It is normal for teens to identify things about themselves that they want to change. But it is very important for them to have realistic expectations for themselves. Setting their sights on a celebrity image to mimic is not healthy or realistic. If weight is a concern, speak with a doctor, who will help set obtainable goals to not only hit your teen's ideal weight, but to become healthier and stronger in the process.

Control Negative Thoughts

When a teen hears those negative thoughts inside, they need to learn to tell them to stop! Focusing on the positive and unique things about themselves, teens can silence this negative voice.

Complementing Self

One way for teens to get into a healthy habit of positive thoughts and body image is to give themselves complements. Professionals suggest they start by giving themselves three positive complements each day.

Tips for Parents of Teens with Negative Body Image

While teens are inevitably responsible for their own body image, parents can help their teens discover their beauty and worth. WebMD offers 5 helpful tips to parents of teens suffering from negative body image:

Be a Good Role Model

One of the best ways for you to impact your teen's self-esteem is to be a positive role model for them. They will notice. Your teen is carefully examining your eating habits, lifestyle choices, and your attitudes about your own body. Pay careful attention to the example you are setting. Ensure that this example is a healthy one. Remember that your child will model your attitude about your body. If a parent is constantly criticizing the changes to their own body, the teen will determine that

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the focus should be on the flaws. Exemplify a positive body image, make healthy changes when you are unhappy with your own body, and direct your teen to setting realistic goals.

Be Positive

Speak constructively, rather than critically with your teen. Help them learn to identify and pursue change to pain points in their body in healthy and constructive ways. Encourage healthy habits such as good hygiene, good posture, healthy sleeping habits and stress relief.

Teach Realistic Expectations

The media is constantly vying for your teen's attention. The media wants to teach your teen their definition of beauty. However, it is up to the parents to teach teens to be skeptical of the images they see in magazines or on screen. Help your teen understand the 'tricks of the beauty industry' in order to understand why the photos they see are not realistic or healthy.

Encourage Character

While the world often sees beauty as the end-all, it is important to instill good character values in your teen. Teach them that beauty comes from within and that a person of good character, integrity, honesty and truth is the most beautiful. Praise the good things they are doing including activities like sports, music, art, etc.

Invest in Health

Health is often forfeited in exchange for the media's definition of beauty. Instill healthy habits into your family. Choose healthy eating, sleeping and exercise habits for your teen and your whole family.

What if My Teen's Body Image Because of a Bigger Problem?

In some cases, teenagers become so consumed with their body image that other problems arrive. Teens may develop eating disorders, social anxiety, or depression. If your teen's negative sense of self has escalated to the point of emotional and mental distress, outside help may be necessary. Shepherds Hill Academy (SHA) is a residential therapeutic boarding school, serving teens suffering from behavioral and mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, and eating disorders. Shepherds Hill may be just what your teen needs to develop a healthy body image.
A SHA, students live in a rustic wilderness environment. Students are removed from popular culture and media as they learn to recognize and appreciate the simpler, deeper meanings of life. By removing modern technology, teens are free to learn healthy living, free of pressure from peers and media. With 100% separate campuses, boys and girls are also free from the distraction of the opposite gender.

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Is your teen struggling with body image? Have they turned to unhealthy and harmful coping mechanisms to find beauty? Give us a call or inquire online today to see if Shepherds Hill Academy may be a fit for your teen.

Article Resources:

- Help Teens build a Healthy Body Image, February 25, 2016, Web MD, Retrieved from: http://www.webmd.com/parenting/raising-fit-kids/mood/healthy-body-image#1
- Lyness, D'Archy, July 2015, Body Image and Self Esteem, Retrieved from: http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/body-image.html#
- Weight & Body Image Disorders: Causes, Symptoms, Signs, Eating Disorder Hope, Retrieved from: https://www.eatingdisorderhope.com/information/body-image

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