

BODY IMAGE PARENT PACK

A Media Smart guide for parents - understanding media and promoting a healthy body image amongst children.

www.mediasmart.uk.com



WHO WE ARE

Launched in November 2002, Media Smart is a non-profit media literacy programme for 7 - 16 year olds. Having produced a range of free teaching materials that have been used by teachers all across the UK, Europe and further abroad, this pack represents our first resource for parents.

The average person sees about 1,500 adverts per day. Media Smart aims to increase children's awareness of media and advertising, to help them think critically about it in the context of their daily lives.

ABOUT THIS PACK

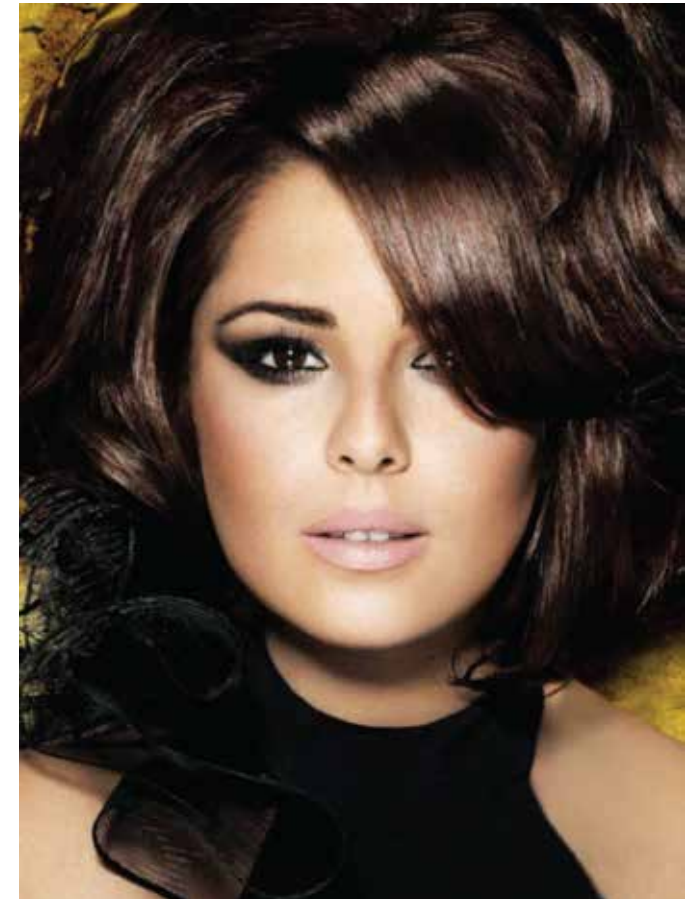
This parent pack focuses on the use of pictures in the media, many of which have been altered in order to improve the appearance of the models or products that they feature.

By helping children understand these pictures are not always a true reflection of the models they feature, we hope to protect them from suffering from low body confidence.

Low body confidence is a complex issue with many possible causes. This pack focuses on one aspect - the impact of the media and advertising.

Having a positive body image should also mean having a healthy body. While celebrating diversity in body shapes and sizes, we should always remember to balance this with the promotion of a healthy diet and lifestyle.

This resource aims to help you guide your child through the pictures they see in the media, and whether they feel they are a true reflection of the diverse world they see around them. This pack is designed to help you start discussions around body image and self-esteem with your child, by offering guidance and useful tips for conversations that can form part of everyday life.



WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

Body image is the way that someone feels about themselves and the way they look. Negative body image is often seen as a problem associated with girls, but both boys and girls can be affected by a range of physical and mental health issues.

WHAT SHAPES BODY IMAGE?

The 'perfect' body is a socially and culturally constructed ideal. During the Victorian era, the ideal body type was plump and full-figured, and their preoccupation with corsets caused a variety of health problems. A more slender look was adopted in the 1920s, in part due to the active lifestyles adopted after the First World War.

The power of celebrities to influence the agenda is not new. In the 1950's, Marilyn Monroe set the trend for a fuller figure. The arrival of Twiggy in the 1960s changed perceptions again, setting a body ideal that encouraged skinniness.

Different cultures also value different physical attributes. The pictures we see in the media every day reflect western ideals and would differ from those in other parts of the world.



WHAT SHAPES CHILDREN'S BODY IMAGE?

Leading psychologist, Dr Susie Orbach, says there are many factors that shape the way children feel about themselves, such as friendship groups and family values. Children receive both positive and negative messages about their bodies and other personal characteristics from the people around them.

Many of the pictures used in the media only offer a one dimensional view of beauty or the 'ideal body shape'. Placing an emphasis on the importance of personal attributes and human values over physical beauty is a crucial factor in tackling many of the issues surrounding body image.

As children grow, body image becomes closely related to self-esteem, and research has shown that poor self-esteem can have an impact on both physical and mental health. Problems can include eating disorders and mental illnesses such as anorexia and body dysmorphic disorder.¹

By helping children to be thoughtful about what they are absorbing, both from the media and their surrounding environments, you can help foster confidence in their individuality and encourage them to develop a positive perception of their own body image.



Keira Knightley's bust was digitally enhanced in the publicity images for King Arthur in the U.S. but the British posters kept her natural physique.

¹ Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a mental health problem related to body image, in which an individual has a preoccupation with one or more perceived or slight defects in his or her appearance.

ARE THE IMAGES CHILDREN SEE EVERY DAY AFFECTING THEIR BODY CONFIDENCE?

Over the last few years, body image has grown as an issue while at the same time we are exposed to more media and advertising than ever before. Children are increasingly using the internet and social networking sites such as Facebook.

This has further increased their exposure to the often unrealistic body types that are portrayed within media and advertising. This exposure to the 'perfect' body image can encourage children to have unrealistic expectations, sometimes leading to serious physical and mental problems, as well as low self-esteem.

It is not just children who are affected. Adults suffer from many of the same concerns relating to body image, and you, as parents, may face the same pressures from the media and daily life. While these concerns cannot always be helped, it is unlikely that you would want your child to share them. As a parent, you can help your child to deflect the cultural and social pressures that they are subject to.

It is essential to help children understand the impact that the media and advertising can have on their body confidence. Children pay attention to the pictures that surround them; therefore it is important to ensure they understand, from a young age, the inconsistencies between what is real and what has been altered.

Research has shown that children are becoming more and more concerned with their bodies at younger ages. Girl Guiding UK, the United Kingdom's largest voluntary organisation for girls and young women, recently conducted research which found that 75 per cent of 11 - 21 year old girls diet to look more attractive. Moreover, research by Beat has shown that 20% of those who suffer from an eating disorder are male, and that many more go undiagnosed.

75%

of 11 to 21 year old girls diet to look more **attractive**

HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THE PICTURES THEY SEE

You can help limit the likelihood of your child being affected by poor self-esteem, by ensuring your child understands that most of the pictures they see have been altered or enhanced in order to increase their appeal and attractiveness.

ARE THE PICTURES WE SEE IN THE MEDIA REAL?

Aspirational pictures can affect the way children feel about themselves, as they compare themselves with models or celebrities, often without understanding that these pictures have been altered.

Take a look at the pictures within this pack. It is estimated that the majority of pictures we see every day have been altered in some way. Often it is hardly noticeable that a picture will have been altered, such as removing a stray hair or changing the background of a photograph. However, certain alterations can mean that the picture you are seeing is not an accurate representation of the actual physical appearance of the model, celebrity or object in the photograph.

Many children are unaware that the physical attributes they aspire to are not real and have been electronically altered. Unless they are made aware of the reasoning and techniques behind such alterations, they are giving themselves unrealistic and unattainable goals of beauty, such as flawless skin or long skinny legs.



A before and after picture of actor Jonathan Rhys Meyers. Look at the difference in skin colour and smoothness.

PICTURE ALTERATION TECHNIQUES

Today, technology is so advanced we are able to create flawless pictures using techniques including:

AIRBRUSHING

This technique can be used to alter a picture to 'smooth out' imperfections such as making skin appear clearer. This technique is used to try to create a flawless look.

DIGITAL ENHANCEMENT

Enhancements can be used to accentuate aspects of a picture, for example by making a model's hair shinier/muscles more defined or on objects to make jewellery look more sparkly and food look more delicious.

PHOTO MANIPULATION

This method can alter a picture by making the model appear thinner/taller/make eyes bigger/jaw more or less square. It can change a model's body or face shape and can also be used to change the reality of the shot e.g. alter the background of an image.



A photo of Britney Spears before and after it was altered. Look how it has changed. Looking at the photo on the right, would you have known it had been altered to such an extent? Would your child know?

Body Image Parent Pack

SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM

It can be difficult to sit down with your child and have discussions about body image and self-esteem. However, questions on body image and its influencers come up in everyday conversations with children. Here are some tips to help you talk to your child about body image and self-esteem.



TIP 1. REMEMBER YOU'RE A ROLE MODEL

A child's self-esteem and body confidence can be affected by the way that their parents react to their own body image. You are the most influential role model in your child's life and although it is difficult to feel confident about your body all the time, by appearing to be neutral or positive about your own appearance, you will be helping your child to develop their own body confidence.

BE POSITIVE

Be positive about your own body size and shape. Try not to complain about parts of your body you don't like and shield your child from these opinions by not discussing them in front of them.

HELP YOUR CHILD

Help your child to think critically about media messages and images that promote unrealistic body shapes. Encourage your child to question and challenge Western society's narrow 'beauty ideal'.

ACCEPT OTHER PEOPLE'S BODY SIZES AND SHAPES

People come in all body shapes and sizes. Help your child to understand that there are many forms of beauty that differ from those they may see in the media. Place emphasis on personal attributes such as personality, achievements, skills and outlook on life. Refrain from placing emphasis on physical aspects such as prettiness, likeness to celebrities or thinness.

However, do not feel scared to praise the physical attributes that make your child unique, whether they are tall, short, narrow or wide.



TIP 2. HELP YOUR CHILD FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT THEMSELVES

It is important to remember that a strong sense of identity and self-worth are crucial to your child's self-esteem. By placing other positive attributes over beauty, you can help foster your child's individuality.

LISTEN TO THEIR CONCERNS

Listen to their concerns about their body image. Reassure your child that their physical changes are normal and that everyone develops at different times and rates.

DON'T TEASE THEM ABOUT THEIR WEIGHT, BODY SHAPE OR LOOKS.

Even seemingly friendly nicknames can be hurtful if they focus on some aspect of the child's appearance.

PLACE VALUE ON THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

Achievements can include your child's talents, skills and other strengths. Consider having a discussion about the difference between personal human attributes such as personality, and physical attributes such as body-weight. What do they think is more important; to be a good person or to be a beautiful person?

Ask them to think about the people they know and love. What is it that they love about them? Discuss whether or not they feel that we put too much importance on physical beauty over human attributes.

RESPONDING TO YOUR CHILD'S CONCERNS

Providing a balanced response to your child's body image concerns will help minimise their impact and help to ensure that they do not become embedded in your child's thinking. If faced with statements from your child such as "I'm fat" or "I want to be skinny like so and so", you may wish to consider the following points:

- Ask why they feel that way, in order to better understand their concerns.
- Provide reassurance – discuss body diversity and how the beauty ideals they may be relating to lack diversity. Tall, short, wide and narrow are all body shapes that are beautiful.

TIP 3. WORK THROUGH THE IMAGE ALTERATION ACTIVITY

Work through this Image Alteration Activity to help your child distinguish between what is real and what is altered.

Look through magazines and TV adverts with your child and ask if they think that the pictures have been altered. If so, discuss together how they may have been changed. You can also use the pictures provided within this pack as examples.

Discuss together whether your child thinks our perception of beauty is influenced by the techniques used in the media. Diversity in body shape, ethnicity or age is not always seen within advertising campaigns and other media. Does your child think that the people in the adverts are a fair representation of reality?

Ask your child whether they aspire to look like the models they see in the media. How does the fact that the body shapes are manipulated make them feel? Does it change their aspirations?



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hibyAJOSW8U>

Follow this link to view Dove's Evolution video illustrating how an image can be 'enhanced'

HEAR FROM THE EXPERTS

“Feeling comfortable in our skin is important, but it can be difficult because we just don’t look like the pictures of models and celebrities that we see around us in the media every day.

My own research has shown that 92% of girls worldwide want to change at least one aspect of their physical appearance, with 12% resorting to extreme measures to lose weight. Highlighting the inconsistencies between what is real and what has been altered can be a valuable tool in helping children towards self- acceptance as they realise that the celebrities and models they are invited to admire don’t quite look as they are portrayed.

Catching the low self-esteem that comes from having a negative body image from a young age is important. It is equally important for children to have a chance to develop positive relationships with their bodies.”

DR. SUSIE ORBACH
AUTHOR
PSYCHOANALYST AND MOTHER

“Today’s children are subjected to a wide range of pressures to conform to an idealised body image.

Developments in technology, media and commerce mean that children are constantly bombarded by images that try to convince them that looking a certain way is important. Parents tell us that they are concerned children are experiencing too much too young in terms of aggressive advertising and over-sexualised images.

We must provide families and children with the skills and resilience to manage commercial influences and show children that beauty comes in all colours, shapes and sizes.”

DR KATHERINE RAKE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
FAMILY AND PARENTING INSTITUTE

“Advertising is a multi-million pound business and our children are surrounded by adverts all the time The power of a celebrity endorsement is very potent to children and young people, so it’s really important to help children understand the impact that the media and advertising can have on their body confidence.

We all need to address this very important subject so we can all raise happy, confident kids with a positive perception of their own body image.”

SUE ATKINS
AUTHOR OF ‘PARENTING MADE EASY
- HOW TO RAISE CONFIDENT CHILDREN’

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Media Smart would like to thank the following people for their support and guidance in the development of this resource -

**THE GOVERNMENT'S BODY
CONFIDENCE CAMPAIGN**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/creating-a-fairer-and-more-equal-society/supporting-pages/body-confidence-campaign>

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www.familyandparenting.org

DR SUSIE ORBACH

Leading Psychologist

If you are at all concerned about your child's body image, self-esteem or eating behaviours, consult with your doctor for information and referral.

Information is also available on the NHS choices website:

www.nhs.uk/livewell/Pages/Livewellhub.aspx

Media Smart is a non-profit media literacy programme for 7 to 16 year-olds, focusing initially on advertising. Media Smart develops and provides free of charge, educational materials to primary and secondary schools that teach children to think critically about advertising in the context of their daily lives.

Media Smart is supported by: Advertising Association, BTHA, Carat, Channel 4, Facebook, Ferrero, Generation Media, Google, Hasbro, IAB, IPA, ISBA, ITV, Lego, Mattel, McCann, McDonald's, SKY, SuperAwesome, Viacom.

For more information and resources please visit:

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