



School Counsellor Newsletter

Edition 46

Promoting positive body image in boys: Let's talk about positive messages

This newsletter is the fifth and final in a series inviting parents to learn about how behaviour and language can contribute to body image, shape and weight concerns – along with unhealthy eating – among boys. This newsletter focuses on summarising the key messages and conversations you can be having with your son around this topic. It is based on the excellent advice provided by The Psychology Hub's registered nurse and therapist, Anna Comins, and senior clinical psychologist, Jo Vallance, in the livestream they delivered to the Medbury and Christ's College parent community on 7 September.

Our children are like sponges; they see what we do and hear what we say and then often do, say and think these things themselves. So it is really important that the messages they are hearing from us as parents about body image, are positive and helpful. It is also important to not shy away from conversations about body image, even if they may be difficult, as showing interest and curiosity about this topic lets your son know that it is something he can talk about with you if he needs to. Below are a number of themes that may be helpful for you to review so that you feel equipped to have such conversations.

Promote body acceptance. We all have our own 'set point', or in other words, the body that we are born with and has been passed on to us through family genetics. You can talk with your son about his body, where some family traits may be obvious and how his body, no matter its shape and size, helps him to do lots of amazing things. Let him know that any form of body shaming is a form of discrimination and should not be accepted. Take the time to talk with him to help him to cope with any negative

comments he may hear from others and his own potentially critical inner voice if he is impacted by such negative comments. It is also important to help your son think about his actions, for example, if he were to make such comments about others how they could have a significant impact for that person.

Promote a healthy diet to help fuel his brain. I

have discussed the link between food and mood in a previous newsletter which you may like to revisit: [Food for thought ... and wellbeing](#). Our brains use a significant amount of energy and so need to be well fuelled. If your son is restricting his food intake, is interested in some kind of fad diet, for example to help him build muscles, or is exercising excessively, his brain will not be adequately fuelled. Help your son to maintain, or develop, positive thoughts about eating and exercise by focusing on eating and exercising as being important to help him think, learn and feel well. Exercise should be promoted as being fun, playful and something to look forward to with friends. Please feel free to revisit the second and third newsletters in this series which talked about key messages regarding food and exercise in more detail: Promoting positive body image in boys: [Let's talk about food](#) and [Promoting positive body image in boys: Let's talk about exercise](#).

Be the voice of reason. There is a large amount of potentially damaging information regarding body image, especially online. It is important to challenge these messages and expectations as they are often not realistic or helpful. Talk to your son about what he is looking at online and challenge the negative body image messages that exist. For example, your son should not be feeling guilty or fearful about eating certain foods; think he is overweight; think that other people look better than he does; have lots of food rules or think he has to exercise or he will put on weight. Please feel free to revisit the fourth newsletter in this series which talked about key messages regarding social media in more detail: [Promoting positive body image in boys: Let's talk about social media](#).

Take home messages across the newsletter series:

1. Your son hears what you say and sees what you do. Think about the messages you are sending about positive body image.
2. Positive body image comes with being kind to your body.
3. As a parent, be the voice of reason in an unrealistic online world. Be curious and have conversations about what your son is viewing online.

4. Do not accept body shaming as it is a form of discrimination.
5. Weight gain is normal for boys as they are growing and going through puberty.
6. Avoid “good and bad food” labels. All food has some nutritional value.
7. Promote exercise as a fun and social activity.
8. Seek professional help if you sense something is not right for your son.



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If you wish to discuss the services the School Counsellor can provide, please see your son's homeroom teacher or Scott Johnson:

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