

10 THINGS PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP PREVENT EATING DISORDERS

- 1) Examine the ways in which your beliefs and attitudes and behaviors about your own body and the bodies of others have been shaped by the forces of weightism and sexism. Then educate your children about (a) the genetic basis of differences in body types; and (b) the nature and ugliness of prejudice.
- 2) Examine closely your dreams and goals for your children and other loved ones. Are you overemphasizing beauty and body shape, particularly for girls?
 - a) Avoid conveying an attitude which says in effect “I will like you more if you lose weight, don’t eat so much, look more like the slender models in the ads, fit into more slimmer clothes, etc.”
 - b) Decide what you can do and stop doing to reduce teasing, criticism, blaming, staring, etc. that reinforce the vilification of being overweight and the glorification of slenderness.
- 3) Learn about, and discuss with your sons and daughters, (a) the dangers of trying to alter one’s body shape through dieting; (b) the value of moderate exercising toward stamina and cardiovascular fitness; and (c) the importance of eating a variety of foods in well-balanced meals consumed at least three times a day.
 - a) Avoid dichotomizing foods into “good/safe/no-fat or low-fat vs. bad/dangerous/fattening”.
 - b) Be a good role model in regard to sensible eating, sensible exercise, and self-acceptance!
- 4) Make a commitment to exercise for the joy of feeling your body move and function effectively, not to purge fat from your body or compensate for calories eaten.
- 5) Make a commitment not to avoid activities (such as swimming, sunbathing, dancing) simply because they call attention to your weight and shape. Similarly, refuse to wear clothes that are uncomfortable or that you dislike, simply because they divert attention from weight or shape.
- 6) Practice taking people in general and women in particular, seriously for what they say, feel, and do, not for how slender or “well put together” they appear.
- 7) Make a commitment to help children (both male and female) appreciate and resist the ways in which television, magazines, and other media distort the true diversity of human body types and imply that a slender body means power, excitement, and sexuality.
- 8) Make a commitment to educating boys about the various forms of violence against women, including weightism and their responsibilities for preventing it.
- 9) Encourage your children to be active and to enjoy what their bodies can do and feel like. Do not limit their caloric intake unless a physician requests that you do this because of a medical problem.
- 10) Do whatever you can to promote the self-esteem and self-respect of your daughters, nieces, and sisters in intellectual, athletic, and social endeavors. Give boys and girls the same opportunities and encouragement. Be careful not to suggest that females are less important than males, e.g., by exempting males from housework and childcare. A well-rounded self and solid self-esteem are perhaps the best antidotes to mindless dieting and disordered eating.