

Body Image Series: Part 1

Activity: Take some time this week to think about all the things you like about yourself. Write down at least 10 things, and if you have trouble coming up with 10 things, ask someone who loves you to help you out. We are usually our worst critic—our family and friends can identify positive traits we may not see. Throughout the week, when you feel like you are not measuring up to society's standards, take your list out and read it. Read it until you start feeling better with who you are, based on your standards.

According to experts, body image is so important in our society that cosmetic surgery is one of the fastest growing medical procedures being performed. There are a lot of people who are unhappy with their appearance and are willing to risk surgery, suffer through extensive recovery periods, and bear significant financial costs to achieve a certain look. We should ask ourselves where these ideas of what we should look like come from and why looking a certain way is so important.

Learned Behavior:

Body image is more than what we think about when we look in the mirror. It touches everything we think or feel, so our emotions are involved, and our self perception generally affects how we feel about everything. Experts state that our ideas about our body image change with each new situation we are in, and that our body image is usually not based on fact, and is linked with our level of self-esteem.

It's psychological or, "in our heads," and it's not something we're born with like hair color or a natural ability. It's something that we learn.

The Guilty Parties:

We learn about body image first in our families, and then with our peers, but most of our learned behavior comes from our culture. Often our families and peers are just repeating what our culture dictates as the accepted standard of appearance or behavior. In our society, our culture praises us for being thin, and for looking youthful. If we need to feel accepted and valued by others, we can often become influenced by this type of pressure to fit a certain model and look a certain way. When we feel pressured to conform, we can sometimes make bad choices. We will starve ourselves, or we will binge because we get depressed with the whole effort, or we will do both in a cycle—starve, binge, starve, binge, etc. When we make changes for anyone other than ourselves, the journey is more difficult.

Who Are We?

The place to start understanding the role of body image in our lives is at the beginning, asking ourselves who we are, and what makes us special. We are more than a number on a scale. We are more than a wrinkle-free face or a limber body. We have skills, talents, personalities, brains and hearts, and that's what makes us unique. Each one of us is different, each one of us is special, and that's where we need to start.



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