

Our body image and self esteem

How you feel about yourself and your body matters. It can impact your mood, mental health, wellbeing and how you approach each day.

We call it body image and self esteem, and we're going to take a look at what these terms mean, as well as when and how to get support if you're struggling with either of them.

Body image is how we think and feel about the way we look and the relationship we have with our bodies. Sometimes we may not like a part of our body or appearance. This could be a sign that we need to talk to someone and get some support.

Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves in general. Healthy self-esteem is balanced. It's okay to recognise our weaknesses - we all have these - but we also need to recognise and celebrate our strengths too. Everyone can experience poor body image and low self-esteem.

Social media can be really challenging if you struggle with either of these things.

It's so important to remember that what you see on social media is not always the truth. Photos can be - and often are - heavily edited and don't reflect how people look in real life. Try not to compare yourself to the images you see online and in the media. They're often not a true reflection of the people in them. Take some time to notice how social media makes you feel about yourself and your body.

There is a lot of pressure to have the 'perfect' body and look a certain way. But comparing yourself to others ignores the fact that we're all different. And that's okay. Unfollow any accounts that make you feel bad about yourself or your body. Follow body-positive accounts instead, or take a break from social media.

Sometimes that's easier said than done though, and you may need to ask for help or support. Here are some things to look out for:

- You spend a lot of time focussing on a certain part of your body
- You see a certain part of your body as flawed or like it needs fixing
- You spend time doing things to improve or hide the area of the body that you don't like
- You always think that you're not good enough
- You avoid people or situations
- You spend a lot of time feeling sad or down
- You do things that you don't enjoy because you feel like you have to
- You avoid or put restrictions on eating certain foods

These negative thoughts can influence how we feel and behave so it's important to challenge them. Here's a way to help you do this. Imagine that your thoughts are being investigated and you're a detective. You're being asked to produce evidence for or against those thoughts. Like any good detective, you need to figure out the facts.

Consider the following:

1. What evidence is there that my thoughts are true?
2. What evidence is there that they're not true?
3. Are there any other facts I've not paid attention to?

Now you need to take the role of a lawyer, asking questions to dispute or challenge those thoughts. To help, you could look at other ways of thinking about the situation.

1. How might someone else see this?
2. How would I view the situation if I didn't have low self-esteem?
3. Am I overlooking something?

Remember, detective work is about being objective. Analyse and think over your thoughts rather than accepting them as the truth and believing them without question.

Here are some other ways that may help you feel more body positive:

- Think about how incredible your body is to get you up and moving and doing things you love each day
- Spend time doing things you enjoy
- Recognise your strengths and what you're good at
- Be kind to yourself. What would you say to a friend if they were feeling like this?
- Think about the feeling behind the negative thought
- Remember that all bodies are different and that's okay
- Talk to a friend, your family, a teacher or a school nurse about how you're feeling

Of course it's important to look after ourselves, but if you're worried about a friend and their body image or self esteem, there are some things you can do to help:

- Reassure them that you're their friend, and you want to help
- Give them a compliment. Share what you love or admire about them
- Do something fun together, like going for a walk round the park or watching films you both love
- Be kind and aware of what you're saying. Words have the power to upset someone or make them worry about how they look
- Lead by example and avoid body shaming and diet conversations
- Talk to an adult you trust, like a teacher, school nurse or a family member

When it comes to poor body image and low self esteem, you don't have to suffer alone. There's lots of help out there for you online, at home and school, or through your doctor. Remember, everybody is different and that's okay.