



3 SIMPLE SHIFTS

**What to Say to Help Kids Feel
Good in Their Bodies & With Food**





Welcome to *What to Say!*

Want to help your kids grow up confident in their bodies? Small changes in our everyday conversations can help them thrive—in every body. In this guide, we'll explore the impact of body dissatisfaction and learn practical strategies to help kids develop a healthy relationship with food and their bodies.

We'll cover topics such as:

- Understanding body dissatisfaction and its impact
- Challenging common misconceptions about weight and health
- Developing mindful language and setting positive examples

By the end, you'll have the tools and knowledge to empower the kids in your life to feel good in their bodies and at ease with food. Let's get started!



What is Body Dissatisfaction?

We've learned that the first and most important step in preventing eating disorders and other harmful outcomes for kids is understanding body dissatisfaction—what it is, how it develops, and how we can stop it. By addressing this, we can help kids feel good in their bodies and at ease with food.

We've created a video series to accompany this guide and encourage you to watch these short videos to better guide you in making these small but impactful changes for the kids in your life.

Let's start by understanding what body dissatisfaction really means and how it affects us all:



Scan this QR code or click the play button below!





KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE VIDEO

- **What is body dissatisfaction?** Persistent negative thoughts about one's body, often fueled by cultural messages about the "ideal" body.
- **It affects everyone:** Kids are deeply impacted by these cultural messages, often feeling "not enough" as they grow.
- **The impact is widespread:** Body dissatisfaction can lead to eating disorders and affects nearly 80% of young people, often leaving lasting feelings of inadequacy that harm their health and well-being.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What do you feel would need to change about your body for you to feel 100% okay with it? How does this belief affect other areas of your life? How might kids internalize similar thoughts about themselves?

We know this topic is heavy, but keep reading—there's hope and practical steps ahead! If you're ready to dive deeper now, here are a few great resources to explore:



[How to Raise Kids Who Feel Good About Food and Their Bodies](#)



[Breaking Free from Diet Culture: Protecting our Youth's Health and Self-Image](#)

Why is Body Dissatisfaction a Problem?

Did you know that 77% of young people don't like their bodies? Let's dive into why the prevalence of body dissatisfaction matters so much—for us, for our kids, and for our society as a whole.



Scan this QR code or click the play button below!



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE VIDEO

- ▲ **It starts young:** By age 6–8, nearly half of girls and one-third of boys already want to change their bodies, influenced by cultural messages that they're "not enough."
- ▲ **The ripple effects:** Body dissatisfaction is linked to a range of serious outcomes, including eating disorders, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and harmful behaviors like substance misuse.
- ▲ **Body size or weight does not determine health or well-being:** The appearance of a "perfect body" doesn't tell us anything about a person's health, happiness, or internal well-being—and believing otherwise fuels widespread body dissatisfaction.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Do you find yourself using body size or weight as a measure of health, success, or value? How do you think these beliefs—whether spoken or unspoken—might affect the kids around you?

GO DEEPER RESOURCES:



[How to support boys who are struggling with their body image](#)



[How to support girls who are struggling with their body image](#)



[What to do if you think your child might have an eating disorder](#)



A KEY INSIGHT

Body dissatisfaction is like the story of the ham in the video that gets cut off before cooking—passed down without questioning why. For generations, we've believed that body size determines health and worth, perpetuating unnecessary and harmful dissatisfaction in ourselves and our kids.

Next, we'll step into our kids' shoes to better understand how our words and actions can pass down a true view of health and well-being.

Food & Body Myths that are Harming Us & our Kids

Let's dive into how we can support kids' body image by challenging the myths we've been sold about weight and size.



Scan this QR code or click the play button below!



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE VIDEO

- ▲ **We and our kids don't have as much control over our body weight as we think:** Our body's biological mechanisms work against efforts to change our size, which is why weight-loss attempts often fail.
- ▲ **Kids experience their bodies as themselves:** When we tell kids their bodies are wrong, we're telling them they are wrong—and this can have lifelong consequences.
- ▲ **Body dissatisfaction affects self-care:** Kids who don't feel good about their bodies are less likely to take care of them. Positive body image is essential for healthy habits and well-being.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Think back to your childhood. Can you recall a time when someone you looked up to made a judgmental comment about their own body, yours, or someone else's? How did that comment make you feel, and how did it affect the way you viewed your own body?

GO DEEPER RESOURCES



[Why diet culture is the problem \(not your body\)](#)



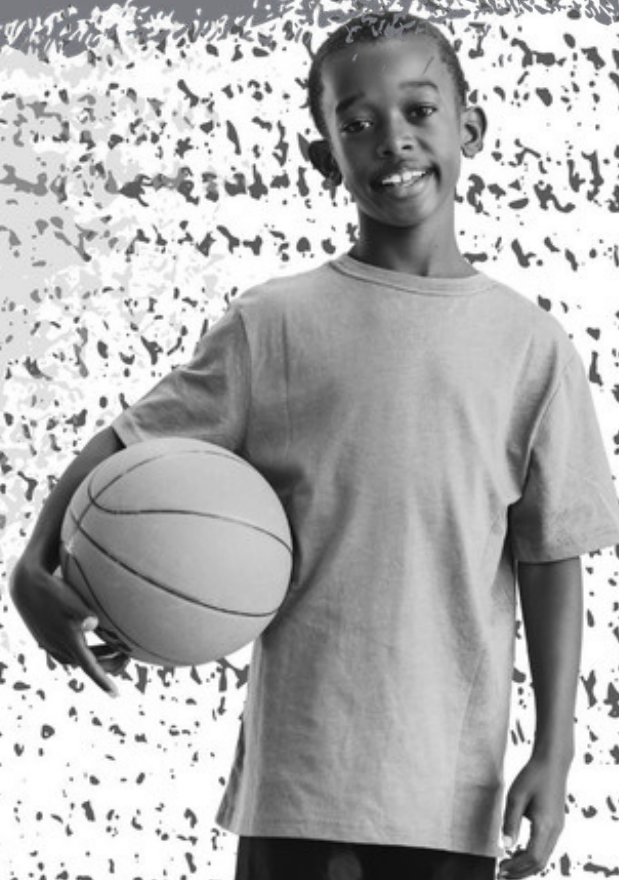
[3 things teens wish you knew about diet culture](#)



[How to define "healthy" for kids](#)

We can change this narrative. Starting now. By pausing and questioning the status quo, we can help our kids feel good in their bodies and set them on a healthier, happier path.

Let's wrap up with three practical simple shifts we can make to protect our kids from the damaging effects of body dissatisfaction & support a positive relationship with their bodies.



3 Simple Shifts for Happier, Healthier Kids

Here are the tips you've been waiting for—where we focus on what you can do to make a difference. Thank you for sticking with us. Understanding the problem, recognizing how deeply it affects kids, and putting ourselves in their shoes is an essential step toward creating lasting, positive changes.

This video highlights the importance of being a positive role model for the young people in your life. The good news is that we don't need to take on anything extra—we simply need to decide what kind of influence we want to have and make little shifts.



Scan this QR code or click the play button below!



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE VIDEO

▲ **We all have influence.**

As parents, grandparents, teachers, coaches, or community members, we shape how kids see their bodies and treat them. It's not about doing more but being mindful of our impact.

▲ **Treat all kids, in all bodies, the same when it comes to food and body.**

Kids in smaller, larger, or average-sized bodies all need the same things for health. Let's prioritize health and well-being for all kids.

▲ **Eliminate body comments from your vocabulary.**

How often do we make comments about people's appearance—whether positive or negative? If we stop focusing on body size, we can show kids that there's so much more to value about people than their looks.

▲ **Stop linking food and exercise to appearance.**

When we connect food or exercise with changing our bodies, we teach kids that their health depends on appearance. Instead, let's teach them that movement is about taking care of their bodies, and food is fuel for living their best lives.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Think about the role you play in a young person's life. How can you shift your language or actions to focus more on health and well-being, rather than appearance or weight?

GO DEEPER RESOURCES:



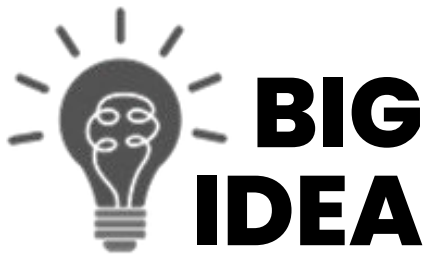
[7 Guiding Principles: How to Prevent Eating Disorders & Inspire Well-Being in Kids](#)



[What to Say Instead of Talking About Diet and Weight](#)



How to Stop Body Dissatisfaction Before It Starts



Shift from Focusing On

Appearance

"Does my child need to lose or gain weight?"

to

Health & Well-being

"Is my child at ease & making healthy choices?"

1. Treat all kids, in all bodies, the same when it comes to food and body.

TRY THIS:

Apply your guidance on food, body, and exercise equally to all the kids in your life. If the changes you're suggesting are truly about health, make them a group effort! And remember, health encompasses more than just diet and exercise. Emphasize a holistic approach by focusing on the healthy habits below.



Healthy Habits to Emphasize with Kids:

- ▲ Physical activity they enjoy or that helps them feel good
- ▲ Uplifting friendships
- ▲ Limits on screen time
- ▲ Practices to relieve stress and tension
- ▲ Creative time
- ▲ Nourishing foods and drinks (water)
- ▲ Hygiene
- ▲ Sleep



Kids have limited control over their body size and how it changes, even with lifestyle choices. Let's prioritize and celebrate choices that become the habits that promote health. We can trust that a healthy body weight and size will follow.

2. Compliment the person, not their appearance.

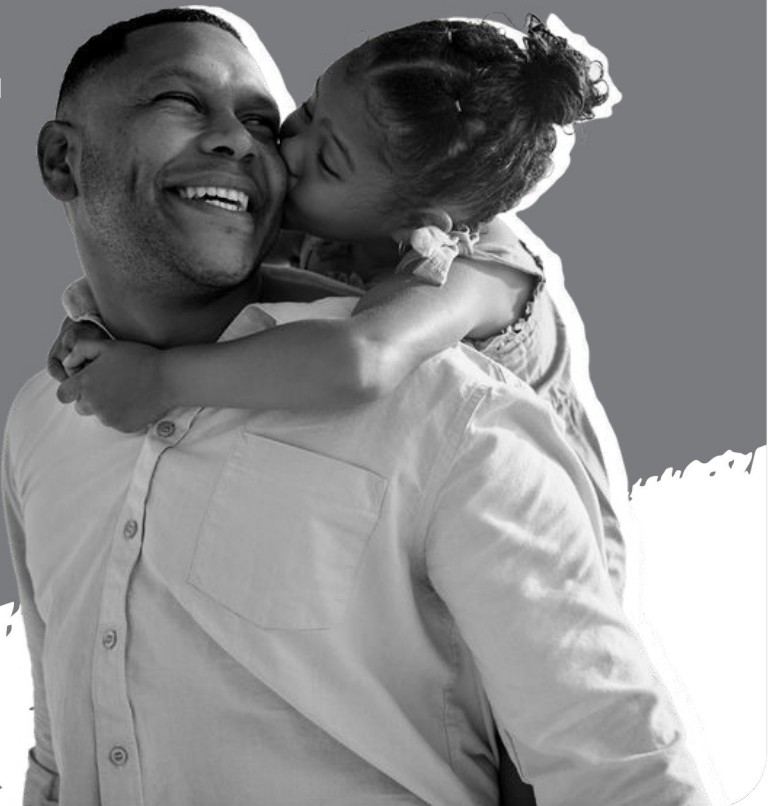
TRY THIS:

Instead of commenting on someone's body (positive or negative), let them know what you admire about their character or tell them how much they mean to you.



Compliments That Aren't About Appearance

- 💬 "It is so good to see you! I've missed you."
- 💬 "She has such a great energy about her!"
- 💬 "I love how he makes people feel seen and important."
- 💬 "You are a wonderful listener. I always feel understood by you."
- 💬 "I'm so grateful you are in my life and that we can spend this time together."
- 💬 "I'm proud of how much work you put into that and how you showed up even when it was hard."



Kids notice what we admire and criticize, which highlights what we value. Because they look up to us, they may start to focus on these things to earn our approval. Let's use our words to emphasize qualities that matter more than appearance or size.

3. Avoid connecting food and exercise to appearance.

TRY THIS:

- ▲ Teach kids that movement is about taking care of our bodies, not about changing how we look.
- ▲ Explain that food is fuel to help us do what we love and that all foods can be enjoyed without feeling guilty or ashamed.



Simple Shifts

"I gained so much weight over the holidays, I need to start working out."

→ "Let's get outside and move, it's fun!"

"I'm definitely going to have to start a diet tomorrow if I eat this."

→ "This food is incredibly tasty! I would love a small serving."



Our body size involves many factors beyond just diet and exercise, and food and activity are about more than just changing how we look. Let's keep these ideas separate for kids so they can develop positive attitudes towards food, their bodies, and staying active.

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 *Feel free to share this guide with whoever needs it. Print it, email it, or text a link.*

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GO DEEPER IN YOUR ROLE

- **Parents and families:** Learn the 3 Simple Shifts at withall.org/shifts
- **Coaches:** Get your free What to Say certification at withall.org/coaches
- **Teachers:** Build a body-healthy school culture at withall.org/schools
- **Healthcare providers:** Earn CME credit at withall.org/healthcare

Support This Work

This guide is one piece of WithAll's work to help kids feel good in their bodies and with food. That work only happens because individuals and businesses fund it directly. If it helped you, consider making a gift at withall.org/donate.

Get Financial Help

If you or someone you love is facing an eating disorder, you are not alone. Our Recovery Support Program provides grants for groceries and housing during intensive treatment. Apply at withall.org/apply.