



EMPOWERING PARENTS TO RAISE
THEIR CHILDREN TO BE SUBSTANCE-FREE

Talk Early And Often About Alcohol, Tobacco And Other Drugs. Even When It Gets Tough

Know! - Social Media and Negative Body Image

As spring fades into summer, everyday attire tends to become more revealing, especially among youth. Just like when most of us were kids, our children will see those picture-perfect swimsuit models splashed all over grocery store magazines, on billboards and in TV ads, and chances are, they will feel pressure to look like them. While exposure to such images is nothing new, today, social media has taken that level of exposure and pressure to new heights.

Images of “perfect” bodies are literally in our children’s faces countless times a day, regardless of the season. In the past, it was mainly fashion models and celebrities promoting “perfection,” but now it hits much closer to home – it’s your teen’s friends and other peers posting selfies that feature them looking their best – and the pressure for your child to measure up has increased significantly.

Most of us can think back and relate to teens feeling self-conscious about their appearance. But imagine having to be camera-ready at any given moment. In our teens’ world, there seems to always be someone pulling out a cell phone and taking pics. And the likelihood of that picture being posted for all the world to see and critique is high. Now add the websites and apps where teens rate each other, post photos of themselves and get votes for being ‘Hot or Not’ and share videos on YouTube that beg for opinions on their appearance. If they’re told they are not pretty enough, not muscular enough, too skinny or too overweight, they may turn to one of the many online tutorials giving advice on how to improve their appearance – many of which are far from healthy.

Studies have shown traditional mainstream media (magazines, movies, TV, etc.) to have a negative impact on the body image of many adolescents – which is one’s perceptions, feelings and behaviors toward his/her body. The new question being posed: *“Is social media’s ‘camera-ready’ pressure bad for teen body image?”*

While researchers have not yet answered that question, there are some common sense steps we, as parents and other caregivers, can take to counteract the negative messages our children may receive.

Do a reality check: Emphasize the fact that athletes and other celebrities have personal trainers to work them out, chefs to make them special meals, and a team of people to make them look good. Also, remind them that many of the photos they see on magazine covers and online have been altered to make people (including their friends) look flawless. One glance at the real men and women in their lives is sure to drive this point home.

Be aware of what you say and do: Parents play a major role in developing their child’s body image. Instead of focusing on appearance, focus on health. You can set a positive example by eating right, exercising and making other healthy lifestyle choices - your kids are watching and learning.

Talking regularly with kids about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using.

Know! urges you to encourage other parents to join Know!.

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Keep an eye on their social networks: Your child may desire to bulk up, slim down or make other changes to their appearance. There are many sites and apps that will assist them in doing so, but many promote risky behaviors to achieve such results. Talk to them about the potential dangers of things like extreme exercising and taking pills or supplements in an attempt to look a certain way.

Help put it in perspective: It is likely that at some point your son or daughter will receive criticism on a picture or comment he/she posts. Talk to your child about what is being put out there in the first place and then help put negative feedback in perspective.

Remind them that less is not more: Reinforce to sons and daughters that less – as in clothes – is not more, and that it opens the door to any number of negative consequences. Make clear your expectations for your children not to post pictures of themselves or others that are provocative or otherwise inappropriate.

When children succumb to the unrealistic pressure for perfection, they are more likely to experience low self-esteem and low self-confidence, which in turn can lead to depression, poor school performance and risky choices. Be aware of the extreme pressure social media may place on your child and begin the conversation toward healthy body image today.

Sources: [Caroline Knorr for TODAY: Is social media's 'camera-ready' pressure bad for teen body image?](#) Common Sense Media: [Boys and Body Image](#). Common Sense Media: [Girls and Body Image](#).