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101 Ways to Help Your Daughter Love Her Body
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One-and-a-Half Dozen Suggestions for Helping Girls Love Their Bodies

In addition to teaching parents how they can talk to their daughters about sensitive issues concerning their bodies, and offering ideas that can motivate girls to engage in active lifestyles, *101 WAYS TO HELP YOUR DAUGHTER LOVE HER BODY*, is chock full of other unique suggestions so parents can:

Teach Body Love Even to the Youngest Girls(1) Explore Parental Fears About Baby Fat

In a society in which fat is an anathema, even the most well-meaning parents can panic over baby fat. That panic can become part of the emotional atmosphere in a home. Through their body language, parents may unwittingly communicate disapproval of a chubby baby — and a baby can pick up on this. Besides, research indicates that fat babies are no more likely to become obese adults than babies who weigh less. Adults who overreact to baby fat are influenced by hurtful childhood experiences. By working through their own fears, parents are free to convey the message that their little girl is perfect just as she is — and they'll mean it. (2) Get Her Out of the Stroller or Car Seat and Up On Her Own

Two Feet

Rather than transporting your toddler in your arms or in a stroller, when safety permits, schedule time for her to walk to where you're going. After all, walking is the original weight bearing exercise. This way you can enhance her motor and mental development, and set the stage for an active lifestyle and healthy body.(3) Reframe Barbie's Image

Use playtimes to teach your girl that she has a body that's far superior to Barbie's — but don't preach, play. After all, even a child can figure out that Barbie's feet are only comfortable in high heels, and her hair is so long that it can get caught in athletic nets and fences. As your girl matures, you can continue to demonstrate through play that Barbie has been designed so unrealistically, and so unlike a real woman — more like the computer-perfected images in magazines — that Barbie can't have as much fun and excitement in life as your daughter can. **Consider What Mothers Can Do**(4) Give Girls Permission to Love Their Bodies

This can lead to the conversation we all wish we'd had with our mothers — an opportunity to share experiences that may have led you to dislike or become critical of your own body. When you give a girl permission to love her body you are encouraging her to feed herself and engage in activities that will keep her fit and healthy. Giving her permission to love her body is similar to a mother who has been in a bad marriage telling her daughter that she hopes she will create a more loving relationship for herself. (5) Don't Make Aging Sound Like a Curse

We can teach our girls to disavow the media message that when it comes to our bodies, beauty is more important than function. Instead, we can focus on the miracle of our bodies and explain that health declines are not largely attributable to the passing of years, but instead, to inactivity and inadequate nutrition — both of which are within our control. This way, we can give our daughters the message that no matter what an individual's age, her body is always worthy and deserving of loving self-care. (6) Give Her the Freedom to Not Smile

According to one study, women return smiles at a rate of 93 percent, compared to only 67 percent for men. As women, we grow so accustomed to smiling that many of us recount even the most harrowing experiences with a smile on our faces. It's more than just a mind/body conflict. As mothers, we realize that a disingenuous smile can communicate uncertainty, diffidence, and lack of confidence, which is just the opposite of what we would like our daughters to project. In raising girls who love their bodies, we can teach them to speak up about how they're being treated, and where to draw a line. And when that time arrives a girl needs to know how to say the words without smiling. **Consider What Dads Can Do**(7) Comb and Brush Your Daughter's Hair

When you have childhood memories of your dad's strong hands gently grooming your hair, while listening to your thoughts and dreams, there's a good chance that you won't grow up and think of yourself as having a lot of bad hair days. There's no better way to teach a girl to love her locks. (8) Acknowledge Her Physicality

Since girls usually view their dads as being physically strong, you can boost her image of herself as physically powerful by engaging with her in activities you might normally reserve for a son, such as, playing football with her, teaching her to climb a tree, or wrestling. A lot of dads don't wrestle with their daughters because they think of them as too fragile. But if you think about it, this is the kind of play that teaches a girl that she can dictate what happens to her body, even when she's up against someone who's bigger and stronger. Just be sure to respond immediately to any commands she might make, such as, "Stop!" or "Back off!" You'll be teaching her to set boundaries concerning her body. (9) Watch Those Teasing Words

Many fathers use teasing as a way of communicating with their kids. While this can be fun for younger girls, that's not necessarily so for pubescent girls who are sensitive about their changing bodies. In a society in which so many girls and women feel shame about not having the "perfect" size, fathers can learn that what they say about their daughter's bodies can be for the good or ill. **Protect Girls from the Assault of Popular Culture**(10) Fortify Her Against the Power of Advertising

Despite a daily bombardment of print and broadcast images, we can teach our girls to see the truth behind commercials. We can help them realize, for instance, that they can't wolf down fatty fast food meals or high sugar soft drinks and then look like the slender actors in commercials. Girls can learn to resist unhealthy commercial messages concerning their bodies and instead make self-loving choices. (11) Limit Fashion Magazines in Your Home

Many publications present young women as beautiful, empty-headed clothing racks. And the range of who is deemed beautiful is so narrow that these models might as well be the same person, page after page. All of this sends a powerful message, convincing girls that this is what "normal" looks like. In fact, so many girls underate, in hopes of looking like fashion models, that one medical organization has suggested that the media's obsession with skinniness is largely to blame for an escalating number of eating disorders. In teaching our girls to love their bodies we can give them an appreciation for their unique features and shapes. (12) Teach Her to Pay Attention to the Songs She's Singing

While you can't control what she's singing you can help your daughter to understand that she may be programming herself with "disaffirmations," denigrating musical phrases that can influence her attitude about how her body should be treated. A girl who loves her body is more likely to challenge, question, or poke fun at lyric that says, for instance, "hit me again."**Boost Her Body Image** (13) Give Her a Full Length Mirror and Flattering Lights

Remember how you had to stand up on the toilet lid to see yourself in the bathroom mirror? Our girls deserve more. A full-length mirror won't leave a girl guessing about what she really looks like, particularly when her body is undergoing dramatic changes. And rather than fluorescent bulbs, the right kind of lighting can help her to see herself the way people who love her do. Anyone in possession of something they view as precious is more likely to dole out loving care. (14) If You're Slimmer than Your Girl, Don't Wear Clothes She Has

Outgrown

In a world in which slimmer is considered better, slender mothers who wear clothes their daughters have outgrown are setting up a situation in which the girl will see herself as having a body that's inferior to mom's. So while it may seem wasteful to donate "perfectly good clothing," to charitable organizations or sell them in garage sales, in the long run, you'll be glad you did. [\(15\) Familiarize Yourself with Behaviors Associated with Eating Disorders](#)

Research has shown that having a poor body image is a significant predictor of future eating disorders. As with overeating, chronic dieting has been linked to emotional factors. People who are perfectionists and those who are driven with "the need to please" often have unreasonably high expectations about being thin. Some risk their lives in an attempt to have the "perfect" body — one that "everyone" will approve of. In teaching our daughters to love their bodies, they can learn that "perfect" means being fit, as opposed to being skinny. **Teach Her to Eat in a Self-loving Manner**[\(16\) Create an Environment that Supports Healthy Eating](#)

A lot of parents reason that it's not fair to siblings who don't have "weight problems" to refuse to stock the kitchen with high-fat, high-sugar snacks and soft drinks. But since these foods and beverages aren't good for anybody, no one is deprived when they're not made available. There are other ways to create a healthy-eating environment, including putting an end to any food bribes and fad diets. [\(17\) Change Her Notion of Comfort Foods](#)

We can rewrite the family script so our daughters can learn to comfort their minds and bodies with nourishing foods. After all, the only real requirement for comfort food is that it should be associated with being cared for. What a wonderfully affirming message, that our girls can comfort themselves while making healthy choices. [\(18\) Ask a Grandparent or Other Caring Adult to Teach Her to Prepare Healthy Meals](#)

A lot of us are just too busy to teach our girls to cook — that's why it's a good idea to ask some other caring adult (one who understands or who is at least willing to learn how to prepare low-fat, highly nutritious food) to teach your girl for you. If your daughter never learns she may have to accept a diet of processed, packaged, or take-out meals, with an overload of salt, sugar, and fats. By learning to prepare nutritious meals for herself, she will not only find it easier to maintain a healthier weight and body, but she can have lots of fun in the kitchen.