

Uniquely Me

A **parent's** guide to building girls' body confidence





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We're on a mission



At Dove, we're on a mission to encourage young people to think positively about the way they look, enabling them to reach their full potential in life. Globally, nine out of 10 girls want to change something about their physical appearance and six out of 10 girls are avoiding a range of everyday activities, from exercise to getting involved at school, because they feel bad about the way they look.

That's why, in 2004, we set up the Dove Self-Esteem Project to help support parents, mentors and teachers in sending out a positive message and to ensure the next generation of women grows up to be happy and content, free from the burden of beauty stereotypes and self-doubt.

More than

19 million

young people around the world have received Dove's self-esteem building programs and body confidence education.

This booklet has been written by experts and designed for and by parents. We hope the advice and activities outlined on the following pages will help you to help your daughter see her own unique beauty and find the self-confidence to shine. Visit selfesteem.dove.com for many more articles with stories, advice and support to help your daughter be her best self.

Here's to our daughters –
the beautiful young women of tomorrow.

About this booklet

As a parent, it's natural to want the best for your child – for them to be happy, healthy and confident individuals.

But that's sometimes easier said than done, especially during the teen and pre-teen years when their bodies are changing, their self-confidence is fragile and they are trying to make that tricky transition out of childhood.

How do you help your daughter maintain a positive body image and find her sense of self when her world is filled with unrealistic images of physical ideals; one-dimensional, 'flawless' beauty, and narrow messages about the 'perfect' lifestyle? How do you help her deal with the pitfalls of teenage life such as appearance-related bullying or keep her eating healthily and enjoying physical activity (without getting hang-ups about food and body shape)?

In creating Uniquely Me, we have gathered advice on some of the key topics we know have an impact on girls' self-esteem and body confidence, from media, peer and cultural pressures to teasing and bullying about appearance. We've worked with experts in the fields of psychology, body image, self-esteem, eating disorders and media representation to create a resource for you that is focused on advice and action.

Use the articles and activities in the guide to help you identify any self-esteem issues you think may be affecting your daughter and begin to tackle them head on. Each section includes an action checklist – pointers to help you make positive changes or initiate conversations with your daughter about things that may be troubling her or unhelpful messages that she might be receiving. Our research tells us that by reading and acting on the issues in this booklet, you will have a significant positive impact on your daughter's self-esteem

We start with the most important influence in all of this: you. Some people are surprised to learn that even today, parents remain the number one role models in their daughters' lives. With this in mind, you have a responsibility to lead by example and learn to love yourself, too.

All of the articles in this guide are also available on the Dove Self-Esteem Project's online hub, along with plenty more expert advice on different subjects affecting young girls, plus videos and activities to share with your daughter.

selfesteem.dove.com



■ How to use this guide

This guide is made up of a series of articles covering key topics we know affect girls' self-esteem. Each article starts out with an introduction to a theme and why it is relevant. Then, to help guide you in making practical changes, we've pulled together an Action Checklist full of body confidence boosting ideas from our self-esteem experts. Finally, we have added a Let's Get Started section, to give you some ways to start the conversation today. Because why wait until tomorrow?

So let's get started...



1. Learning to love yourself



■ If you want your daughter to grow up with strong body confidence, there's a simple thing you can do – love yourself.

Self-criticism is common among teenage girls – how often have you urged your daughter not to put herself down? But sometimes we have low self-esteem, too, and it's possible that you could be teaching her bad habits through the example you set by criticising yourself. Have you ever found yourself looking in the mirror and frowning, or moaning about how you look? You may not even realise you're doing it, but your daughter probably will.



■ Body confidence starts with self-love

Up to 80 per cent of women are unhappy with what they see in the mirror, according to the *Mirror, Mirror* report, published by the Social Issues Research Centre. Worryingly, a recent review of research by the world-leading Centre for Appearance Research at the University of the West of England also shows that mothers who are unhappy with their own bodies are more likely to have daughters with body dissatisfaction.

It's not easy to change the way you look at yourself, but the good news is that a few techniques can help you create better feelings towards your body and, in turn, your daughter will pick up on your positivity.

Love Yourself Action Checklist:



Feeling better about yourself by building your own body confidence is one of the most important steps to help your daughter build her own. Use our thoughtful action checklist created by Dr Susie Orbach, world-renowned psychotherapist and women's campaigner, to cut out the self-criticism.

☐ Take a trip back in time:

look at pictures of yourself from a few years ago that you like. You may find that although you were dissatisfied with your body at the time, you now realise you looked fine. This is a great exercise to help you to accept and enjoy your body as it is.

☐ Give your body credit for all it has experienced:

remember your body has lived, worked, probably given birth, brought up a child and run a household. It is natural that bodies change as we age. Yours is actually quite amazing.

☐ Don't compare yourself to models:

remind yourself that the images in magazines and online are often digitally enhanced in extraordinary ways rather than being pictures of 'real' men and women.

☐ Reconnect with your body:

put on your favourite music and dance around. Feeling how alive your body is from the inside can be really uplifting. Feeling silly? Try a dance or aerobics class instead and get down in a group.

☐ Positive vibes only:

discuss with your daughter the things you like about each other's style. Only remark on positive aspects and try to give specific examples. Listen to the qualities your daughter admires in you and remind yourself of them when you need a boost.

Let's get started...



■ Explore with your daughter how it's easy to digitally distort an image – and learn why there's really no such thing as 'perfect beauty'.

■ Talk to your daughter about how you feel about your own body. Try to stay positive – don't get into the habit of self-criticism.

■ Ask your daughter to tell you off every time she catches you being negative or unkind to yourself. This will help you both keep it top of mind and empower her with responsibility to champion positivity towards her looks.

2. Body Talk: Use the power of your words to feel great

■ Talking about your weight might seem like a great way to bond with your daughter and female friends, but it's worth considering what other effects this could have. Stop the 'fat talk' and start a new kind of positive conversation – and you'll really notice how much better it makes you both feel.

Talking about our bodies is like an unwritten rule in female friendship – we do it constantly and automatically. You know how it goes: “I feel fat in these jeans”, “I’ve put on so much weight” or “Gosh, my skin looks awful today”.

■ Teach your daughter to talk positively about her body

If you're not guilty of these kinds of put-me-downs, then you're in the minority. A recent study of college women published by the Psychology of Women Quarterly found that 93 per cent engaged in this type of talk – dubbed ‘fat talk’ – and a third did so regularly. It also found that those who complained about their weight more often – irrespective of their actual size – were more likely to have lower satisfaction with their bodies.

“Words can have a huge impact on our self-esteem and constantly talking negatively about our bodies can reinforce the idea that there is only one type of body shape that is beautiful,” explains body-image expert Jess Weiner. “It’s a pattern we have to break if we want our daughters to grow up to be confident about the bodies they’ve got.”

■ Less fat talk, more fun talk

A mere three minutes of ‘fat talk’ can lead to women feeling bad about their appearance and an increase in their body dissatisfaction, according to research published in the International Journal of Eating Disorders. So making the effort to cut it out should have a significant impact on how you feel.



By focusing less on weight and body shape in your conversations, greetings and compliments, you can break the habit of reinforcing beauty stereotypes.

■ Watch those unhelpful ‘compliments’

Body talk doesn't just refer to body-bashing. Talking about your appearance, even in a positive way, places undue attention on certain physical features. By telling a friend that they look great and following up with “Have you lost weight?” you're giving the impression that her weight really matters to you and at the same time reinforcing the stereotypical view that skinny equals beautiful.

Our daughters pick up on the type of language that we use and the topics of conversation which we engage in. Eventually, it may start to sound like our physical appearance is how we judge and value ourselves and others. Is this how we want our daughters to evaluate themselves?

Instead, we need to teach our girls that beauty is a state of mind. If you value yourself, it doesn't matter what the world says – you can walk with confidence.



Body Talk Action Checklist:

Some tips on how to have a different kind of conversation:



Tell your friends that you're bored of body talk:

be on red alert next time you meet up with a friend. If she starts any fat talk, tackle the issue head on. For example, say: "I adore you and it hurts me to hear you talk about yourself that way."



Take the one-week challenge:

challenge yourself to a week free from fat talk. Tell your friends and family what you're up to so they can support you and even try it for themselves.



Focus on the fun talk:

highlight the positive emotional and health benefits of changing your lifestyle. If your friend has started a new exercise regime, try asking her how it's making her feel, whether she feels stronger or is sleeping better - not how much weight she's lost.



Replace the negative with the positive:

take a body inventory and think of a replacement statement that is positive for every negative word that you usually speak. Swap "chubby" for "curvy" or "frizzy" for "voluminous".



Appreciate your body for what it can do:

the first step to building your self-esteem and confidence is to love your body. Use it to feel energised – go for a walk and enjoy the fresh air, do some gardening or take the kids out for a bike ride.





Let's get started...



- Share the body talk activity checklist with your daughter. If she's feeling negative about how she looks it could be just what she needs to boost her confidence levels.
- Use the action checklist as a starting point for changing the conversations that you have with your daughter.

- Talk to your daughter about the fact that you're going to avoid body talk in future because there are so many more interesting things for you both to share with each other.
- Encourage her to do the same with her own friends.



3. The Distortion of Beauty

■ Images of women in the media are manipulated so dramatically these days that it can feel like 'beauty' is less and less attainable. Help your daughter resist media influence and see the real picture.

Are you worried that your daughter's expectations for her own appearance are unrealistic? It's hardly surprising. Research published by Psychology Today, called Ads Everywhere:

The Race to Grab Your Brain, estimates that today's teens are bombarded by

5,000 advertising messages a day.

These can come not only via television and magazines, but also from websites, blogs, social media, music videos, movies, and their mobile phones. The way women and girls are portrayed in these messages, both in words and pictures, has a big impact on the way they view themselves and who they aspire to be.

■ The connection between media images and low self-esteem

Constant reinforcement of the so-called 'perfect' woman in the media has a direct impact on girls' body confidence.

Body Image research from MediaSmarts, an organisation that focuses on media literacy, found that looking at magazines for just 60 minutes lowers the self-esteem of more than

80% of girls

In addition, research published in 2012 by Girlguiding, titled Girls' Attitudes Explored found...

66% of girls thought media portrayals of women were a reason why girls go on diets.

In Pretty as a Picture, a poll by UK think-tank Credos, agreed with the statement, "seeing adverts using thin models makes me feel more conscious of the way I look and makes me want to diet/lose weight".

■ How image manipulation shifts our perception of beauty

The majority of photographic images of women we see in the media are the result of not only clever make-up and lighting at the photo shoots, but also careful digital computer manipulation before being published, known as 'airbrushing'. It isn't just spots and blemishes that are airbrushed. Legs and necks are lengthened, breasts are inflated, heads are swapped on to different bodies, nipples are moved, cheekbones enhanced and so on – often so much is changed that you wouldn't recognise the original model in real life.

When you team the airbrushed images with headlines criticising 'real' women who don't match this unrealistic, enhanced image, it's not difficult to see why girls are aspiring to achieve the fantasy airbrushed look.

Claire, mum of 14-year-old Annie, says: "My daughter is constantly reading teen mags and the girls they use always look so flawless. How am I supposed to reassure her about her own looks when she has that to compare herself to?"



■ Left to make up our own mind, we want to look like ourselves

In its Pretty as a Picture research, UK think-tank Credos recently asked young women to compare four different images of the same model, digitally modified to change her shape.

76% of young women actually preferred either the natural or lightly retouched images over the heavily airbrushed ones.

Once she realises that media images are frequently manipulated, and rarely representative of reality, your daughter can start to see through them and protect her body confidence when reading, watching and playing with media. She can begin to realise that it's not worth comparing the way she looks to the unrealistic, fake images she often sees in the media.

Action checklist:

help your daughter see beyond manipulated images of beauty



□ Look at media with a critical eye:

encourage your daughter to scratch beneath the surface of the media she consumes. Model the critical eye that you want your girl to have and get her to come up with reasons why it isn't worth comparing herself to manipulated images.

□ Use a healthy dose of good humour:

look at her favourite TV programmes and magazines together and talk about any images that seem particularly unrealistic or that offer a narrow definition of beauty. You might even have a giggle about the ones that look really fake and have messages that are overly critical of the way a woman looks.

□ Understand the process of image manipulation:

talk to your daughter about who might have been involved in creating these 'looks', from stylists and make-up artists to photographers. Dove's Evolution video is available on YouTube and shows just how radically a woman's appearance can be changed using make-up, lighting and digital tools.

□ Use positive examples when you find them:

find positive media sources to share with your daughter that focus on the strength and abilities of women, not just their appearance.

Let's get started...



■ Get talking to your daughter about this topic. The point is not to stop her enjoying TV, magazines and blogs, but make the decision to revisit this topic from time to time and remind her about the things you've talked about.

■ Encourage your daughter to raise the topic with her friends or as the subject of a project at school.

■ Is your daughter confident enough to write to the editor of her favourite magazine or website to ask them about how they manipulate images of women in their pages?

■ Does your daughter have her own blog or profile on Instagram, Pinterest or other social network where she can be highlighting this issue for others?

4. The Real Me: An activity to celebrate your daughter's inner beauty



■ Your daughter can learn to express her self-confidence

Negative body talk can make it feel like it's not polite to accept a compliment, or that talking about what we're good at will be seen as boasting or vanity. But recognising your talents and allowing yourself to value these characteristics is important to developing positive self-esteem. This is why we created The Real Me activity – to help your daughter be confident in her strengths and abilities and value those talents in her friends as well.

■ Activity Instructions for The Real Me



Use this fun and practical activity to help your daughter vocalise what she loves about being 'me'.

1. Ask your daughter to find a photo of herself she likes and print it out.
2. Use the template opposite or find a big piece of paper and fix the picture at the top with glue or tape.
3. We've started four statements in the template. Read through each one carefully and help your daughter to think about answers for each.
4. Together, try to fill in the blanks. If she can't find the words, she could always draw something instead.
5. When The Real Me poster is complete, why not suggest your daughter share this activity with her friends, to encourage them to think positively about all the things that make them unique.

■ Get your daughter to write about herself, her family and her talents to unlock her inner beauty.

In today's society, it has become common – even fashionable – for people to talk negatively about themselves. It has become particularly common to criticise their appearance as a shortcut for expressing emotional upset. Sometimes, when feeling sad or lonely or lacking in energy, girls express this as feeling “fat” or “ugly”. But fat and ugly aren't feelings, and speaking in this way blunts our girls' emotional vocabulary and places undue emphasis on looks.

• The Real Me •



I am unique in many ways.
These include...

3 things I enjoy doing:

①

②

③

3 things I'm good at:

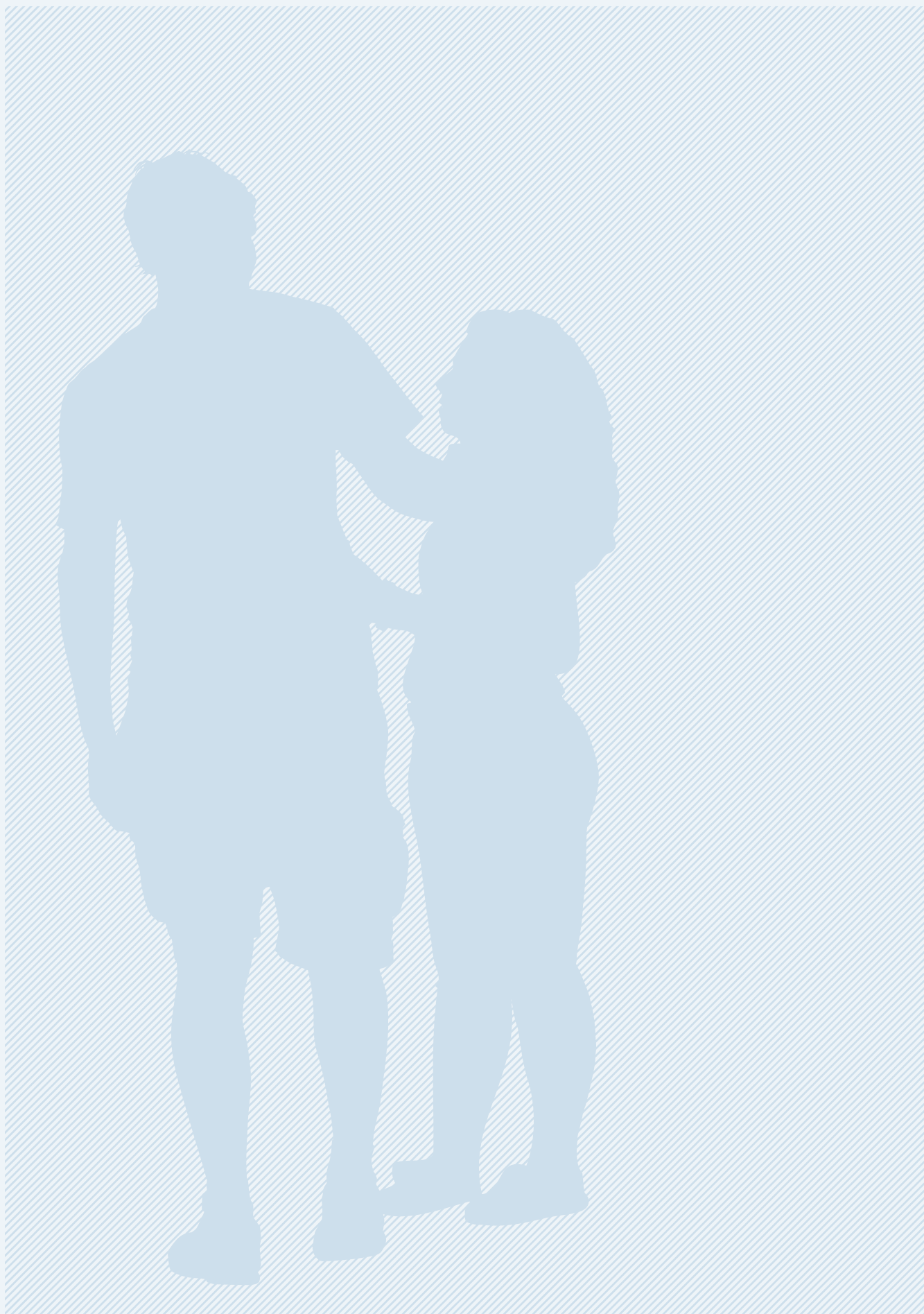
①

②

③

Things I'm really proud of about my family's background
and culture:





The Real Me Action Checklist:



☐ Encourage your daughter to talk about what makes her unique:

in a world of hype and stereotypes, it's important for your daughter to recognise that beauty isn't simply about how she looks – it's about how she feels. Encourage her to recognise and vocalise the great things that make her who she is.

☐ Pay your daughter compliments regularly:

talk to your daughter about what she's interested in and what she's good at. Give her specific compliments that don't relate to her appearance so that she learns to value accomplishments and personality traits beyond her looks.

☐ Set a good example:

use the right emotional vocabulary to express how you're feeling – for example, "I feel tired" or "I feel stressed" not "I feel fat." Challenge your daughter to express herself more accurately if you hear her describing her emotions this way.

Let's get started...



■ Talk to your daughter about the activity. How did she feel when she was starting? Was it hard to think of things to answer the statements? How did she feel when she'd completed it? Was there a change in how she felt about herself? Can she explain it to you?

■ Encourage your daughter to share the activity with her friends.



5. Bullying: Is your daughter being teased or bullied about her appearance?

■ From hurtful teasing to serious bullying, how to help your daughter navigate this emotional minefield.

Bullies are rarely original when it comes to their insults. What were the most common teases or taunts when you were young? “Four eyes”, “freckle face”, “pixie ears” or “tubby”?

Chances are most of the names we remember being called as kids are related to looks.

Sadly, nothing has changed for our daughters. A UK Government study by schools inspectorate Ofsted found that the most common bullying experience of today's school students is related to appearance. In primary schools, bullies focus on physical characteristics such as red hair, being tall or small, or ‘fat’ or ‘skinny’. In secondary schools, other aspects of

appearance come under attack – waistline, skin clarity, hairstyles and personal style that may not conform to the latest trends.

First, we need to understand what we mean by bullying. Girls and boys disagree, fight, tease and banter with their friends. Bullying is different: according to the U.S. government's StopBullying website, it is “unwanted, aggressive behaviour that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.”

■ Why bullies focus on appearance

“This is a stage when young people are discovering who they are and experimenting with how to express themselves. Appearance is a big part of that,” explains Liz Watson, a UK bullying expert with experience advising teens and parents on the issue. “Teenagers are exploring their identity through how they look and they're learning how society reacts to that.”



What are the signs of bullying?

Experts recommend keeping alert for the following indicators of bullying:

- ☐ **Change in behaviour or emotional state** – has she suddenly become more withdrawn or aggressive than usual.
- ☐ **Physical signs** – unexplained injuries such as cuts and bruises or damaged clothes.
- ☐ **Avoiding school** – making excuses and feigning illness.
- ☐ **Lack of interest** – especially in the things she normally enjoys.

Other signs to look out for that might indicate that she's being bullied about her looks specifically:

- ☐ **Changing the way she dresses or styling herself in more extreme ways** – for example, trying to stop wearing her glasses or cutting her hair.
- ☐ **Attempting to cover up her size** – like wearing baggy clothes that cover up her figure.

Of course, many of these signs can be a normal part of teenage life, which makes it difficult to tell for sure unless she opens up.



■ Helping your daughter deal with bullying

You may be agonising over the best way to talk to your daughter for fear of her withdrawing further. But, Watson says, it's best to face it honestly. "You don't have to mention bullying to start with," she advises. "Instead, try something like: 'I'm worried about you, I think you're unhappy.'"

Or you may initiate a conversation in a more neutral way by asking questions about her day, including moments that she enjoyed or found troubling. For example: "What was one good thing that happened to you today? Any bad things happen? Did you sit with friends at lunch? What was your bus ride like?"

Questions such as these might help her to open up about her experiences. It will also help if you let her know that she won't be in trouble and that you're there to help – but make it clear that you can only help if you know what's happening. If she insists that nothing is going on, don't push it. Just stay vigilant for any of the signs above.

■ Being there

Dealing with bullying can take time, so be patient and understanding of what your daughter is going through. Show her you're there to support her and reassure her that she doesn't need to change her appearance – you can both find a way to tackle it together.

Beat Bullying Action Checklist:



☐ Show your daughter she's not alone:

talk to her about your teenage experiences. Maybe you were teased about a particular feature but now recognise it's a part of what makes you special.

☐ Work together:

help to work out a strategy together for dealing with the bullying, but make sure you have her agreement about all the steps you plan to take.

☐ Reassure her:

first off, reassure her that there is nothing wrong with the way she looks and that you admire what makes her individual.

☐ Explain:

help her understand the reasons why people bully others. For example, some bullies come from homes with issues or problems. Help your daughter to see how her happy family life is contributing to her confidence, and others may not be so fortunate.

☐ Acknowledge:

validate your daughter's feelings. If she feels she's being undermined by taunts, gestures or the behaviour of other girls (or boys), she's right – however it might look from the outside. Don't tell her it's not happening, or that she should ignore what's going on – listen to her and believe her story.

☐ Make a change:

if the bullying is coming from people within her immediate circle of friends, encourage her to find a new group.

☐ Spot the patterns:

find out where and when the bullying is taking place. If she's being bullied at certain times or places, get her to recognise this and avoid them or ask friends to accompany her during those times.

☐ Get her to talk to a teacher:

if it's happening at school, and it doesn't feel like something she can solve alone, help her develop the courage to talk to her teacher about it – it's best to talk to a class teacher first and then work up from there if need be.

☐ Talk to the school yourself:

if she isn't happy talking to her teacher alone, consider talking to them yourself. Most schools have an anti-bullying strategy and will know how to approach the situation. But make sure your daughter knows who you plan to speak to and what you intend to do so she doesn't feel betrayed.

☐ Judge if and when to get involved:

it may well be better if your daughter handles it independently with your solid support in the background.

☐ Empower her:

bullies are often cowards, so standing up to one is usually the best way forward. It takes real courage but with success comes a tremendous sense of self-esteem. It can turn a negative experience into real empowerment.

☐ Get back-up:

look for advice on reputable anti-bullying websites that offer young people support from people their own age or from counsellors, which can help improve how she's feeling and help her devise strategies to cope.

Let's get started...



■ Keep the lines of conversation open with your daughter so she can talk about what she's going through. Have other girls she knows had the same experience? How did they deal with it?

■ Whatever the causes of the bullying, remember to reassure her that none of what's happening is her fault and that you're there to support her completely.

■ Help her to understand that the things a bully picks on are usually things that they are jealous about or lacking themselves.

■ Would it help her to talk to others in her situation in an online forum?



6. Teasing at Home: When does family banter become family bullying?



■ Jokes and teasing around the kitchen table are common in most close family relationships, but when it hits a nerve it can contribute to low self-esteem.

As your daughter becomes a teenager, she will naturally become more sensitive to comments about the way she looks and family members may not realise the impact of their words. Of course, robust discussions and gentle teasing are a part of being a family and can help girls develop and explore their opinions and build resilience to the criticisms that are a part of everyday life. However, it's worth thinking twice about what builds character – and what diminishes confidence.

"Hasn't so-and-so filled out?"

"Soon you'll be bigger than your mum!"

"Oh, that puppy fat is so cute."

"Don't you think you should start watching what you eat?"

Sound familiar? Even playful teasing from loved ones about appearance can have a deep impact on girls, damaging their confidence in the long run.

■ Playful words can be very hurtful

"Girls who experience criticism or teasing about their appearance from family members are more likely to try

to control their weight and eat in an unhealthy way, be dissatisfied with their body, compare themselves with friends, obsess over their looks, have lower self-esteem and more depression than girls who aren't teased," says research psychologist and body-image expert Dr Phillippa Diedrichs.

On the flipside, supportive and warm family relationships have a positive effect on body image and body satisfaction among children. So what's the best way to handle the situation?

■ Take your daughter's side and draw a line

Think carefully about where to draw the line between harmless banter and teasing that, however unintentional, is damaging your daughter's body confidence. Taking action can help to avoid it becoming one of your family problems.

Coming up with proactive coping strategies for your daughter to use when she's faced with family teasing is the first step. It may be as simple as ignoring unhelpful

comments or something more overt, like confronting the person making the remarks to let them know how it feels when they tease.

Suki, mum to 12-year-old Mai, went for the simple approach when family members began teasing Mai for being too skinny and saying she should eat more. "I assured them that she does eat but that is the size she is and teasing her is not going to help," says Suki. "Then I talked to Mai, saying that she shouldn't take those comments to heart. I reassured her that as long as she is happy and healthy that's all that matters."

By acknowledging the hurtfulness of appearance-related teasing, actively discouraging it and helping your daughter to develop techniques to deal with it, you will have taken another important step to nurturing and protecting her body confidence.

Family Banter Action Checklist:



Here is our common-sense checklist to help you keep the family comedians under control and stop your daughter feeling picked on.

☐ Look out for hurtful comments:

be alert at family gatherings and conscious of any comments or conversations about weight, body shape, dieting or appearance that are negative or might make your daughter feel embarrassed or self-conscious.

☐ Step in to change the subject:

try to steer the conversation elsewhere without making a fuss – you can approach individuals later if necessary, and check in with your daughter to let her know that those types of comments are not OK, that she is great just the way she is and that you are there for her if she wants to talk.

☐ Have a quiet word:

if someone in the family is continuing to tease your daughter (or tease someone else in front of your daughter) about her appearance or body, consider speaking with them in private. Don't be overly emotional or confrontational and keep your language neutral. Sometimes you will need to approach this in a subtle way, but equally there may be times when the situation calls for a more direct approach. You may find a different approach is required for an adult family member compared with a child.

☐ Explain the situation:

stress the importance of avoiding talking about looks and placing too much emphasis on appearance for girls or ask them not to comment on your daughter's body or appearance at all.

Let's get started...



- ☐ What are the things that really upset your daughter about comments from family members? Is there anything she's really sensitive about? Use what you learn to shape your conversation with other family members.
- ☐ Encourage your daughter to talk to her friends – shared experiences usually make jokey comments feel less personal and hurtful.
- ☐ Does your daughter have the courage to talk to the rest of the family about how their words make her feel?

7. The Parent Translator: How to improve communication between parents and daughters



■ A translation tool to share with your daughter to help communication avoid misunderstandings.

Do you and your daughter seem to argue over the smallest thing? Communicating should be easy. But miscommunication is even easier. You make a simple comment about what your daughter's wearing and she storms off, slamming the door. You ask what she had for lunch and she assumes it's an attack about her diet.

While it's likely you're just trying to show how much you care about her happiness and wellbeing, her reactions suggest you're speaking a different language. Which is why we've created the *What the ?!* Parent Translator especially to help her understand what you're REALLY trying to say.

Give your daughter a copy. It will help her to understand that you don't mean to upset her when you talk about friends, diet and her social life, and may well improve communication between you.

What the?!?

What your parents **REALLY** mean when they say those nagging things:



Parents say:

"You're not going out dressed like that, are you?"

You hear:

*"What are you wearing?
You look cheap."*

What they really mean:

"You look so grown up and that worries me sometimes."

When you are with a good group of friends, you feel happy and confident, so it's only natural for parents to show concern when they think you're hanging out with people who might make you feel bad about yourself.



They say:

"What did you have for lunch today?"

You hear:

*"I suppose you skipped lunch again
— as usual."*

What they really mean:

*"Looking after yourself is important
and I want to make sure you're
eating well."*

Parents understand that healthy meals are good for your body and brain. And if you feel good, you'll be at your best and your happiest.



What the ?!

What your parents **REALLY** mean when they say those nagging things:



Parents say:

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't wear so much make-up."

You hear:

"You're not old enough to wear so much make-up. I don't want boys to like you."

What they really mean:

"You're so naturally beautiful. Wearing lots of make-up makes people think you're a lot older than you are and I don't want you to feel pressure to grow up too soon."

There's lots of pressure to look grown up and to wear make-up. It's fun to try different looks, but your family doesn't want you to feel pressured by your friends and the media to look too old too soon.

They say:

"Oh, you're going out with her again?"

You hear:

"I hate your friend and I don't trust her. She's a bad influence."

What they really mean:

"I want you to be hanging out with people who bring out the best in you. I don't think she makes you feel good about yourself."

When you are with a good group of friends, you feel happy and confident, so it's only natural for parents to show concern when they think you're hanging out with people who might make you feel bad about yourself.

They say:

"You're on your phone AGAIN? You're always on your phone, texting friends you've only just seen."

You hear:

"I don't think your friendships are important."

What they really mean:

"You've been with your friends all day. Making time for yourself and your family is also important."

Your parents probably don't mind you spending time with your friends so long as you make time for family, too. They're genuinely interested in what you've done today, so why not tell them the highlights?



Parent Translator Action Checklist:



☐ Talk to your daughter:

ask her to think about the way the two of you talk. Do you ever misinterpret what the other one really means?

☐ Delve deeper:

once she's read the *What the ?!* Parent Translator, give her the space to bring up the topic, letting you know which scenarios she gets annoyed by most and how you could approach things differently.

☐ Develop a thick skin:

try not to get offended if she confesses she finds your comments seriously annoying. Instead, use it as an opportunity to ask her why she finds them annoying and how she'd suggest you approach these situations in future.

☐ Keep talking:

next time she flares up, try to explain the true meaning of your words and refer to the Parent Translator as a reminder of how miscommunication gets out of hand.



Let's get started...



- Share the Parent Translator with your daughter and ask her what she thinks. How did the comments make her feel? Can she see that what people say and what they mean are open to interpretation?
- There will still be times when your daughter misinterprets what you're saying, but by showing her that you don't intend to hurt or upset her, you're laying a solid foundation to deal with difficult situations differently the next time around.
- Make a pact with your daughter to give each other feedback when either of you say something that comes across as different to what is actually meant. Open and honest communication like this builds trust and strengthens your relationship for the long term.
- Encourage your daughter to share the *What the ?!* Parent Translator with her friends and have the same conversation with them.

8. How to encourage your daughter to enjoy a healthy balanced diet

■ Help your daughter really enjoy her food and break the bad habit of teenage diets.

We all have days when we feel like we've eaten the wrong things, but are there really such things as a 'bad' foods that we should never eat?

"The most crucial thing when it comes to our diet is eating a balance of all foods," explains eating disorder expert and leading UK psychotherapist Dr Susie Orbach. "Getting hung up on labelling certain foods as 'good' and others as 'bad' isn't helpful – it creates too many rules that dictate your relationship with food and encourage disordered eating. It's also usually wrong. Low-fat foods can be loaded with sugar and fillers to give taste when a normal fat version would be nutritionally better."

■ Girls and teenage diets

For teenage girls, it's common for troubles about the body to play out through food. Most girls experiment with a diet at some stage, often believing that they should be restricting their eating in one way or another.

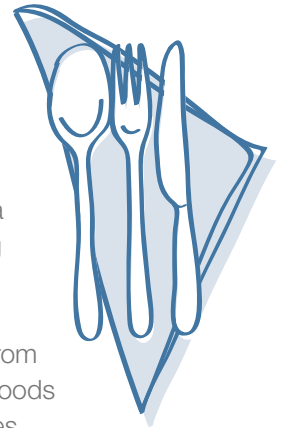
As they grow up, many girls become frightened of food and start to treat it as the enemy. Not surprisingly, food then takes on almost magical qualities, with particular foods becoming magnetic. It's vital that girls develop an understanding early on of how to nourish their mind and body with nutritious foods.

It's not unusual for girls to swing between dieting and bingeing because, having restricted certain foods, their appetites bounce back. If your daughter is doing this, try explaining that it could have the opposite effect to the one she's hoping for.



■ Breaking the 'bad' food habit

"Going on calorie-restricted diets can slow down the metabolism and actually make it harder to maintain a healthy weight. Plus, there's nothing as tempting as a food that is off-limits," says Dr Orbach. Making all foods allowable and moving away from the idea of 'good' foods and 'bad' foods makes it easier to make wise choices.



This was the message that one mother, Barbara, used with her daughter Hannah when she started mentioning dieting. "I explained that enjoying a healthy diet is not the same as cutting out food," she says. "I feel it's important not to make junk and sugary foods seem better by banning them. Through giving her a bit more control and just talking about foods, I've managed to help her improve her diet."

■ The relationship between food and mood

Let your daughter know that dieting doesn't just affect weight. Good nutrition improves your body on the outside (skin, hair and weight), but studies published in the British Journal of Psychiatry show that eating the right foods can also improve our body on the inside, including energy levels. For example, eating a lot of processed food increased the likelihood of depression, whereas those who ate more wholefoods were least likely to be depressed.

■ Lead by example

Encourage your daughter to develop an awareness of balance in her diet by tweaking your own eating habits and attitude to food. If your daughter can see how much you enjoy a healthy, balanced diet – and the positive effects it has on how you look and feel – she'll be more likely to adopt the same approach to her own eating.

Balanced Diet Action Checklist:



Use this action checklist to help your daughter – and yourself – to forget about ‘bad’ food and start enjoying the benefits of a healthy balanced diet.

☐ Get your daughter involved in her food:

cook as many of your meals as you can at home and encourage your daughter to help you shop for, and prepare, the meals. This will give her a better understanding of different ingredients and why they are vital to the overall meal.

☐ Make eating a guilt-free activity for all the family:

ensure your own diet is healthy and balanced and doesn't restrict any one kind of food, unless there's good reason, such as an allergy. Show your daughter that all foods can be eaten without guilt and how you relish different foods that suit different hungers.

☐ Talk about your own thought process:

when you do feel you've eaten something that doesn't suit you, explain your thought process vocally. For example: "Oh I thought I really wanted that food but it didn't sit well with me. I think I really wanted just a bit of it."

☐ Ditch the fad-diets:

they often rely on restricting foods, meaning we miss out vital nutritional requirements. We tend to crave anything we try to restrict and then, when we submit, we often feel guilty and may eat it hurriedly so that we don't even enjoy it.

Let's get started...



■ Use the action checklist to start a conversation about what foods she thinks are 'bad' and 'good'? What made her decide some foods were 'bad'?

■ Encourage her to talk to friends about the subject. What does she learn from hearing what they have to say about food?

■ Would your daughter be confident enough to ask a science or sports teacher at school about this subject?



9. Show your daughter the benefits of physical activity



■ The benefits of being active go far beyond the physical. Find out the scientific facts about the positive link between physical activity and body image and give your daughter the exercise bug.

It can be a struggle to get to the gym or put on our jogging kit, but, according to the UK National Health Service, the positive benefits of physical activity include boosting self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy, as well as reducing your risk of stress.

And that goes for your daughter, too. She doesn't have to be the sports captain or prima ballerina to feel the benefits of being active; she just needs to find an activity she enjoys that gets her body moving.

If she's physically active regularly, she's likely to feel better about herself and her body, regardless of whether the physical activity is dramatically changing her shape.

■ The link between physical activity and body image

Research shows that any involvement in physical and sporting activities is associated with a more positive body image than those not involved in sport. Furthermore, positive body confidence means people feel more comfortable being physically active, which boosts both physical and mental health.

If your daughter sees you being physically active - and all the positive effects it has on you - she's more likely to think it's a positive thing to do in her own life.

Mum Martine says her lifestyle is all about feeling fit and healthy and it's rubbed off on 15-year-old Lucy. "My daughter agrees that exercising and feeling good is far more important than starving yourself and being a size zero," she says.

■ Adolescence is a time for new activities

Experts recognise it's not uncommon for girls to reject activities they previously enjoyed when they reach adolescence. But this is also a time when your daughter's self-esteem is likely to be fragile and the benefits of physical activity could really boost her body confidence. Now's the time to explore new ways of staying fit, find something she wants to do, and outline the benefits.

"We've tried various physical activity classes together and talk about how good it feels to stay in shape," says Martine. "Lucy now really enjoys taking a regular class with her friend and has recently run a 10km race."

The Active Action Checklist:



Use our action checklist to encourage your daughter to try different activities to help her find something she really enjoys.

☐ Support your daughter's choice of teenage activities:

as long as she's enjoying it, go with the flow.

☐ Try new activities together:

if you find common ground with an physical activity you both like, it can even be a great way to spend more quality time together.

☐ Make it social:

joining a team or a class with friends will mean she's socialising while she is physically active, which is usually more fun. And if she's having fun, she's more likely to stick at it.

☐ It's about a state of mind:

talk to your daughter about the strengths that successful athletes need – mental toughness, fine-tuning of particular muscle groups, self-discipline, determination and leadership skills – they aren't all physical!

☐ Show her that all athletes' bodies are different:

their body shapes will be determined by what their body needs to do to perform. What their bodies can do is the critical factor here – not the way they look.

☐ Keep your daughter focused on how she feels, not how she looks:

if she starts criticising her body, help her keep a balanced view and focus on health and overall performance. Aspiring to a media perfect or elite athlete's body is not helpful.

Let's get started...



■ Start a conversation with your daughter about how she feels when she's exercising.

■ Working out can be just as much of a mental health exercise as a physical one. So talk to your daughter about what's going on in her head while she's exercising.

■ Remember that she might feel downhearted or defeated if she gets too competitive with herself, so remind her it should always be fun.

■ Would your daughter have the confidence to write to a sporting hero to ask about how they feel when they exercise?



Over to you...



We hope that you have found this resource useful and relevant for you and your daughter at this time in her life.

Do share the activities and advice with her and keep our action checklists in mind to help initiate conversations and keep transmitting positive body-image messages.

Most importantly, keep talking to your daughter about what she thinks and how she feels. This way you will foster trust and help her see that you respect her as a maturing, unique and loved individual.

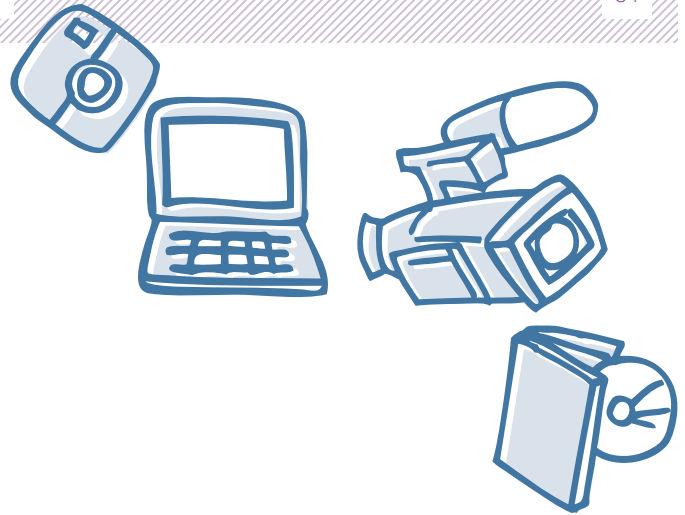
And remember, occasional worries aside, this is a hugely exciting and rewarding time for you as a parent, watching your little girl grow into a confident, independent young woman embarking on a happy, fulfilling life. You are a key part of that process, so enjoy it!

For more information and support, visit selfesteem.dove.com.





References



■ Love yourself

Mirror, mirror – Social Issues Research Centre
Centre for Appearance Research

■ Body Talk: Use the power of your words to feel great

Psychology of Women Quarterly
International Journal of Eating Disorders
Fat Talk Free Week

■ Is your daughter's perception of beauty distorted by the media?

Ads Everywhere: The Race to Grab Your Brain – Psychology Today
Body Image – MediaSmarts
Girls' Attitudes Explored... Role Models – Girlguiding
Pretty as a Picture – Credos
The Evolution video

■ Bullying: Is your daughter being bullied about her appearance?

No Place for Bullying – Ofsted
StopBullying

■ How to encourage your daughter to enjoy a healthy balanced diet

Susie Orbach on Eating – Dr Susie Orbach
Dietary pattern and depressive symptoms in middle age – The British Journal of Psychiatry
Your Diet May Be Depressing You – Rodale News report on The British Journal of Psychiatry

■ Show your daughter the benefits of physical activity

Benefits of exercise – NHS choices
Body confidence campaign: progress report 2013 – UK government
Changing the Game for Girls – Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation

Other resources and inspiration

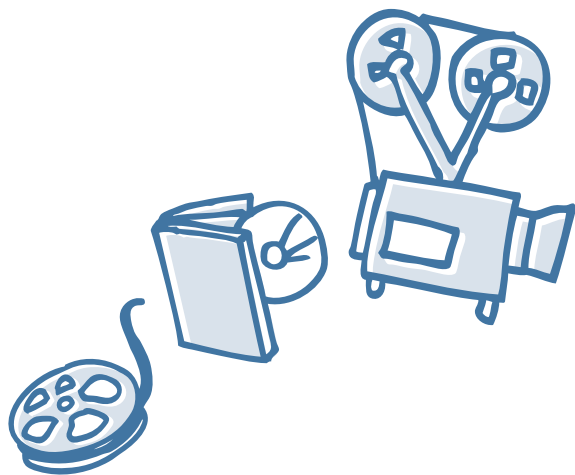
Films – for your daughter

■ Brave

(2012) (US: PG) – Merida, a Scottish princess whose interests include archery and horse riding, is told by her mother that these are not what a princess should be doing and that she has to marry. Merida chooses to defy her mother but things don't quite go according to plan and she has to set out to find a way to fix it.

■ Inside Out

(June 2015) (US: PG) – After being uprooted from home when her father starts a new job, Riley struggles to adjust to her new life in San Francisco. Guided by her emotions – Joy, Fear, Anger, Disgust and Sadness – together they try to help her adjust to a new city and new school while navigating the highs and lows of growing up.



Documentaries – for you

■ America The Beautiful

(2007) (Edited version USA: PG-13) – Tackling America's obsession with beauty, it mainly chronicles a 12-year-old model becoming a grown-up in the fashion industry. Also touches on plastic surgery, celebrity worship, airbrushed advertising and human insecurities.

■ America the Beautiful 2: The Thin Commandments

(2011) – This time the 'America The Beautiful' team tackles the issue of weight in America. It analyses the obsession with weight by looking at the different relationships with food, diet fads and the opinions of medical experts in the field.

■ Beauty Mark

(2008) – This presents an alarming, infuriating and at times humorous look at the forces that shape our perceptions of beauty, as seen through the eyes of psychotherapist and former world-class triathlete Diane Israel. She tells her own story while interviewing other champion athletes, body builders, fashion models and inner-city teens about their experiences relating to self-image.

■ Miss Representation

(2011) – Directed by actress and activist Jennifer Siebel Newsom, Miss Representation uncovers the reasons behind the distinct lack of women in high-powered positions around the world in comparison to men. It also examines how the media plays a crucial role in dominating discourse surrounding societal views on 'what women should look like' and how this in turn affects the self-esteem and self-belief of young girls around the world.

Other resources and inspiration (continued)

Books – for you

■ Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty

(1999) by Dr Nancy Etcoff, Director, Program in Aesthetics and Well Being, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard – Why do gentlemen prefer blondes? Why do women paint their lips red? Why do men strive for V-shaped torsos? What is beauty?

■ Bodies

(2009) by Susie Orbach – Some 30 years after the publication of *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, this book argues that the way we view our bodies has become the mirror of how we view ourselves, raising fundamental questions about how we arrived here.

■ Skin Deep

(2004) by Catherine Barry – A novel about a young woman who believes that, if only she was beautiful and sexy, she would find the happiness she desperately craves. Can you really achieve happiness by going under the knife?

■ Life Doesn't Begin 5 Pounds From Now

(2006) by Jessica Weiner – A step-by-step guide to decoding the 'Language of Fat' and loving your body today. By changing your thoughts, language and actions, you can appreciate your body more.

Books – for your daughter

■ Ask Elizabeth

(2011) by Elizabeth Berkley – The actress famous for her roles as Jessie Spano in *Saved by the Bell* and Nomi Malone in *Showgirls* is also the creator of the Ask-Elizabeth campaign, the work of which she uses to create a book that looks at all the tough parts of growing up. It is put together like a scrapbook, including entries from real teenagers sharing their advice and experiences. With a panel of experts, she advises teen girls in matters of sex, nutrition, body image, personal relationships and fitness.

■ All Made Up: A Girl's Guide to Seeing Through Celebrity Hype... and Celebrating Real Beauty

(2006) by Audrey D Brashich – The author provides an in-depth look at the effect of the media and pop culture on the body image of teenage girls. Stressing how girls compare themselves and try to live up to these highly promoted unrealistic body images, Brashich emphasises that we can break free of these defined beauty rules and learn to love ourselves the way we are.

■ Body Drama: Real Girls, Real Bodies, Real Issues, Real Answers

(2007) by Nancy Amanda Redd – Redd looks at body issues that girls may be embarrassed about or ashamed to talk about with their parents or a doctor. The book covers acne, weight and other issues that can contribute to knocking a girl's self-esteem. Additionally, it features un-retouched images of women of all different shapes and sizes, highlighting that there is no 'normal' and we need to embrace and celebrate all different body shapes.



Other resources and inspiration (continued)

Our Partners

■ World Association of Girl Guides & Girl Scouts

Dove has teamed up with the World Association to help realise our joint vision of a world free from appearance-related anxiety for girls. Our aim is to reach 3.5 million girls with body confidence education by March 2016. Together we have created **Free Being Me**, a brand new self-esteem building badge programme for girls around the world. Find out more at

www.free-being-me.com





Notes



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Dove
self-esteem
project

