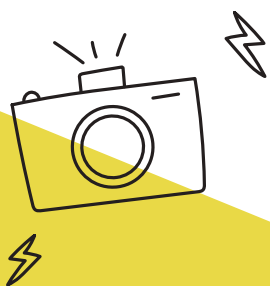




# uniquely me

A Parent's Guide to Building  
Body Confidence





# Contents

04

We're on a mission

05

About this resource

06

1-Learning to love yourself

Lead by example – techniques to cut out the self-criticism and feel better about yourself.

08

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

Do away with body talk and other harmful self-criticism to start a more positive conversation.

12

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

Show your daughter the truth behind the images in magazines, online, and in social media.

14

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

Get creative with this great confidence-boosting activity.

18

5-Bullying: Is your daughter being teased about her looks?

Help your daughter deal with hurtful teasing and bullying from peers.

22

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

Watch out for well-meant teasing within the family – it can still hurt.

24

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

This mini-guide will help your teen decode your next communication breakdown.

28

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

Foster a positive, healthy relationship with food.

30

9. Show your daughter the benefits of physical activity

Encourage your daughter to move her body and discover the feel-good factor.

32

Over to you

34

References

35

Other resources and inspiration

# 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. Over half of girls around the world do not have high body confidence, and eight out of 10 of them avoid a range of everyday activities – from seeing friends and family to getting involved in sports teams or clubs – because they feel bad about the way they look.

**Self-Esteem: The attitude we project about ourselves and our worth.**

**Body Confidence: The way we think and feel about the way we look and how we behave as a result.**

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 self-doubt that comes from appearance pressures.

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 [dove.com/selfesteem](http://dove.com/selfesteem) 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.



**We are on a mission to help more than**

# **40 million**

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

# Adaptation for use with boys:

Uniquely Me works best for girls but is fun and will make a difference for boys, too. Because girls taking part in Uniquely Me learn about appearance ideals and other concepts through the context of their experiences, Uniquely Me can adapt to any cultural or social context. The same is true for boys. The most important thing to keep in mind is to ensure you're maintaining an open dialogue and safe space for your daughter or son to explore these topics.

Alternatively, you could also consider using the Confident Me section of the Dove Self-Esteem Project. This is our school program, and it has been developed to accommodate mixed-gender groups.

Confident Me is available as a free download at [dove.com/selfesteem](https://dove.com/selfesteem).



# About this booklet

As parents, we want the best for our daughters – for them to be happy, healthy and confident individuals.

But that's sometimes easier said than done, especially during the teen and preteen years when their bodies are changing, their self-confidence is fragile and they're 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 keeping 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.

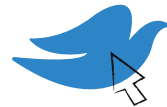
Use the articles and activities in this guide to help you identify any self-esteem issues that you think may be affecting your daughter, and begin to tackle them head on. Each section includes an action checklist – pointers to help you make positive changes to, or initiate conversations with your daughter 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 No. 1 role model in their daughters' lives. With that in mind, you have a responsibility to lead by example and learn to love yourself, too.

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.

[dove.com/selfesteem](https://dove.com/selfesteem)



## 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

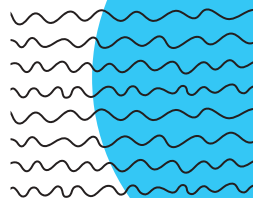
Self-criticism is common among teenage girls – how often have you urged your daughter not to put herself down? But sometimes parents have low self-esteem, too, and it's possible that you could be teaching her bad habits through the example you set by criticizing yourself. Have you ever found yourself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

## Body confidence starts with self-love

Up to 80 percent of women are unhappy with what they see in the mirror, according to "Mirror, Mirror," a report published by the Social Issues Research Centre, in Oxford, England. 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 low body confidence.

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 toward your body. In turn, your daughter will pick up on your positivity.

**If you want your daughter to grow up with strong self-esteem and body confidence, there's a simple thing you can do:  
Love yourself.**



## Love Yourself Action Checklist:

Feeling better about yourself by building your own body confidence is one of the most important steps to helping your daughter cultivate 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 realize you looked fine. This is a great exercise to help you accept and enjoy your body as it is.

### Give your body credit for all it has experienced:

Remember, your body has lived, worked and most likely given birth. You've brought up a child and experienced or weathered various battles. It is natural that bodies change as we age. Yours is actually quite amazing.

### Don't compare yourself to models or actresses:

Remind yourself that the images in magazines, online and in social media are often digitally enhanced in extraordinary ways. They are not necessarily pictures of real women and men.

### Reconnect with your body:

Take some time to do 15 second stretches for your neck or back. Pause and do some concentrated breathing exercises to feel your body's power.

### 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.
- > Pick a code word with your daughter that she can use when you are being unkind or negative toward yourself. This will help you both stay aware and empower your daughter to champion body positivity.





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



Talking about your weight or complaining about your hair 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 body talk – and other negative self-criticism – and start a new kind of positive conversation. You'll notice how much better it makes you all 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 *Psychology of Women Quarterly* found that 93 percent engaged in this type of behavior, dubbed body 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.”

### Focus less on body talk in everyday conversations

A mere three minutes of body talk can cause women to feel bad about their appearance and increase body dissatisfaction, according to research published in the International Journal of Eating Disorders. 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 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 give the impression that her weight matters to you and reinforces the stereotypical view that skinny equals beautiful.

Our daughters pick up on the kind of language we use and the topics of conversation we engage in. Eventually, it may start to sound as if our physical appearance is the main criterion for 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 we value ourselves, it doesn’t matter what the world says – we can walk with confidence.

**“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.”**

**Jess Weiner**  
body-image expert

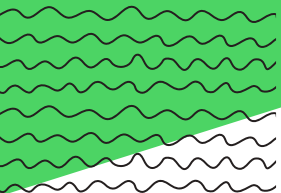
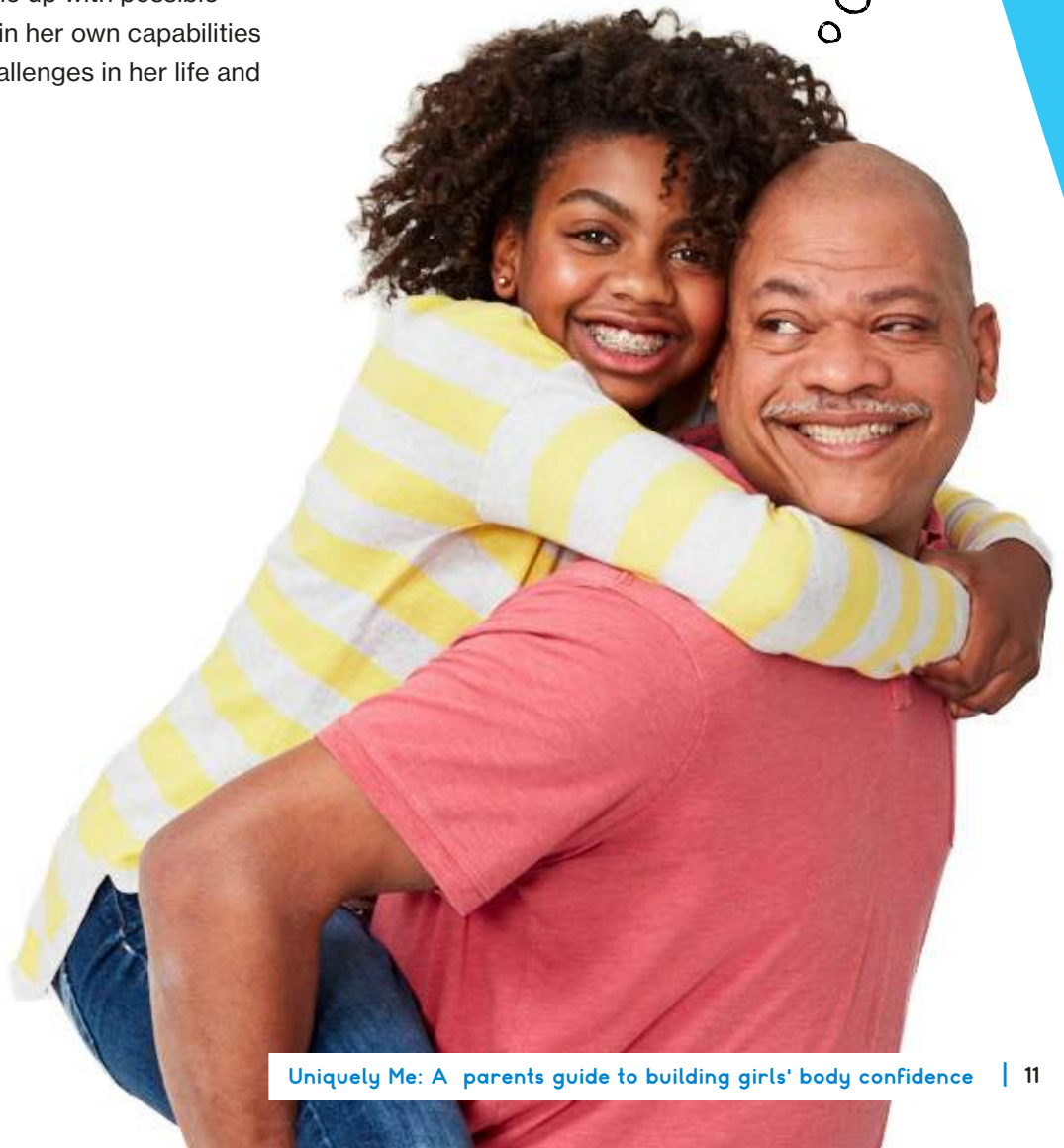
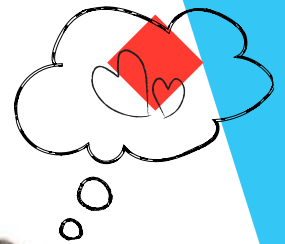




# Advice for fathers

You may never have been a girl yourself, but that shouldn't be a barrier to father-daughter bonding. You want your daughter to grow into a self-confident young woman – and she's going to need her dad on her side. Many men feel a little uncertain, even fearful, talking to their daughters about positive body confidence or appearance. They may think, How can I help? This is not my area.

Don't worry about not having all the answers. Instead, sharpen your listening skills and work through the problem-solving process with her, encouraging her to share her thoughts and come up with possible solutions. Guiding her to trust in her own capabilities will help her confront other challenges in her life and build her self-esteem.





# 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 body talk, tackle the issue head on. For example, say, "I adore you, and it hurts me to hear you talk about yourself that way."

### 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 out "chubby" for "curvy," or "frizzy" for "voluminous."

### Take the one-week challenge:

Challenge yourself to a week free from body talk and other negative self-criticism. 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.

### 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 energized: 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 Action Checklist with your daughter. If she's feeling negative about how she looks, this could be just what she needs to boost her confidence level.
- > Use the checklist as a starting point for changing the conversations you have with your daughter.
- > Reassure her that she can go to you with questions, concerns and insecurities about her body and adolescence in general. Encourage her to do the same with her own friends.
- > 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 as if 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.**

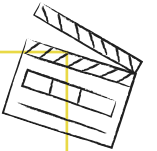
These expectations can come not only via television and magazines but also from websites, blogs, social media, music videos, movies and mobile phones. The way women and girls are portrayed in these messages, both in words and pictures, has a big impact on the way they view themselves and who they aspire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

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.**



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**

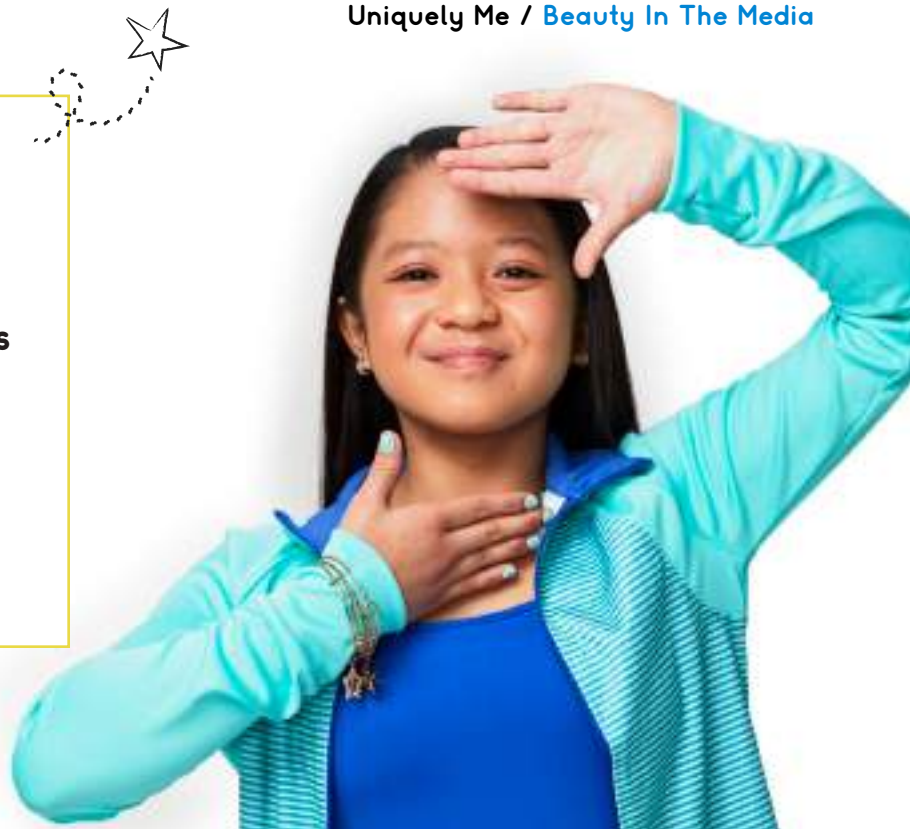
In the “Pretty as a Picture” poll by UK think tank Credos, participants agreed with the statement “Seeing ads using thin models makes me feel more conscious of the way I look and makes me want to diet/lose weight.”

#### 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 makeup 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 onto different bodies, nipples are removed, cheekbones enhanced and so on. Often so much is changed that the original model in real life is hardly recognizable.

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

Claire, mom 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 those to compare herself to?”



**76%**

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

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

In its “Pretty as a Picture” poll Credos asked young women to compare four different images of the same model who was digitally modified.

Once she realizes 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 or playing with media. She can begin to realize that it's not worth comparing the way she looks to the unrealistic, fake images she often sees.



## The Distortion Beauty Action Checklist:

Help your daughter see beyond manipulated images of beauty.

### Look at media images with a critical eye:

Encourage your daughter to scratch beneath the surface of the media she consumes. Model the critical eye that you want her to have and get her to come up with reasons why comparing herself to manipulated images is worthless.

### Use a healthy dose of good humour:

Look at your daughter's favorite TV programs and magazines together, and talk about any images that seem particularly unrealistic or that offer a narrow definition of beauty. You might even laugh at 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 to makeup artists to photographers.

### Use positive examples:

Find positive media sources that focus on the strength and abilities of women, not just their appearances, and share these with your daughter.

## LET'S GET STARTED!

- > Have a conversation with your daughter about beauty distortion. The point is not to stop her from enjoying TV, magazines and blogs, but to remind her about the things you've discussed. Actively revisit the topic from time to time.
- > Encourage your daughter to raise the topic with her friends, or as the subject of a school project.
- > Is your daughter confident enough to write to the editor of her favorite magazine and ask about how the magazine manipulates images of women in its pages?
- > Does your daughter have her own blog or profile on Instagram, Pinterest or other social network where she can highlight this issue for others?

## 4-The real me: An activity to celebrate your daughter's inner beauty

In today's society, it has become common, even fashionable, for people to talk negatively about themselves. This is particularly true when it comes to criticizing their appearance as a shortcut for expressing emotional upset. Sometimes when they feel sad or lonely or lack in energy, girls express this as feeling "fat" or "ugly." But fat and ugly aren't feelings, and speaking in this way blunts girls' emotional vocabulary and places undue emphasis on their looks.

Get your daughter to write about herself, her family and her talents to unlock her 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 recognizing our talents and allowing ourselves 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 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 affix the photo at the top with glue or a piece of tape.
- 3 Read through each of the four statements in the template carefully and help your daughter think through her answers.
- 4 Together, try to fill in the blanks. If she can't find the words, she could always draw something instead.
- 5 When her Real Me poster is complete, why not suggest that your daughter share this activity with her friends to encourage them to think positively about all the things that make them unique?

# 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

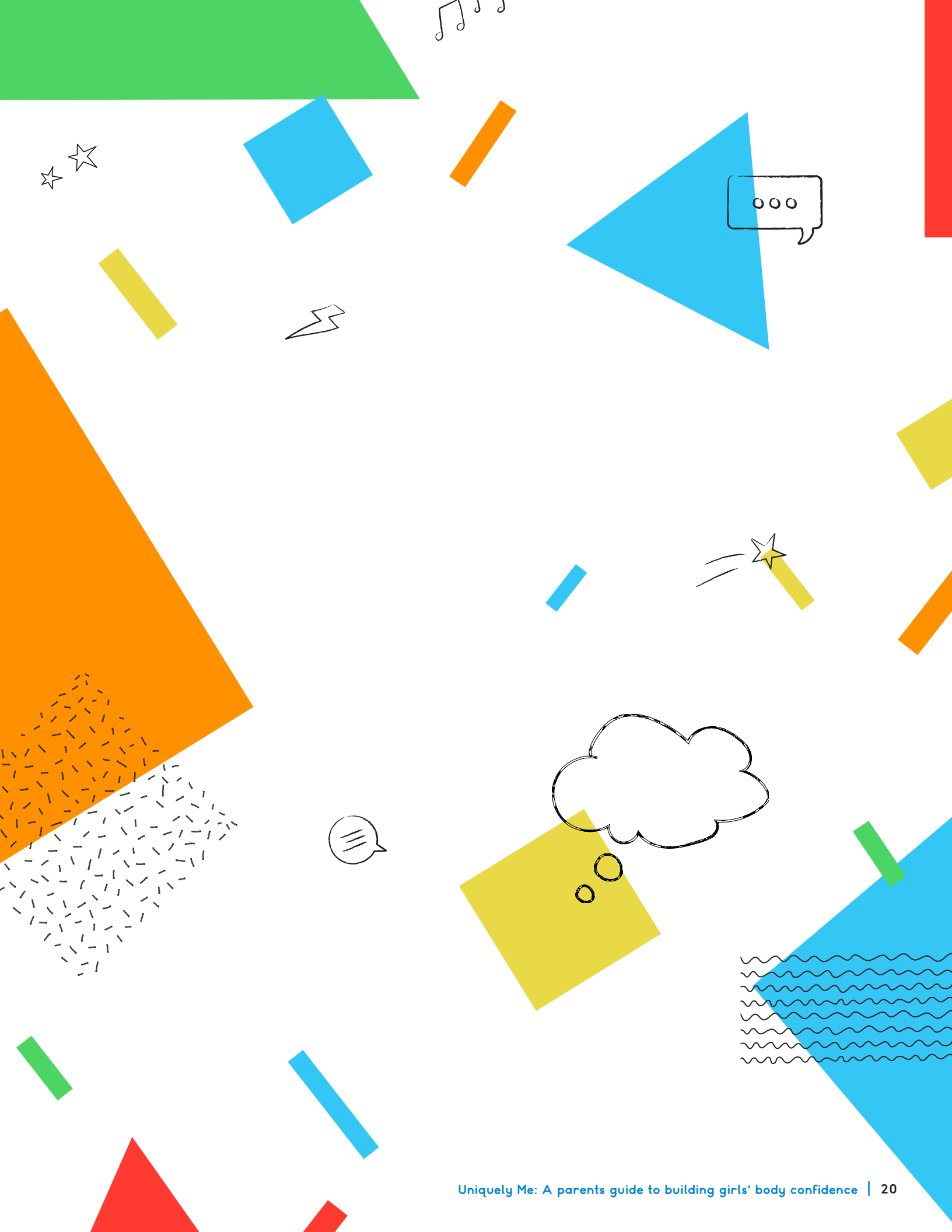
2

3

-----  
-----  
-----

Things I'm really proud 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 recognize that beauty isn't simply about how she looks – it's about how she feels. Encourage her to recognize and vocalize 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 out of shape." 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 Real Me activity. How did she feel when she started it? Was it hard to think of answers for the statements? How did she feel when she completed it? Was there a change in how she felt about herself? Could 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, or fatty.

Chances are, most of the names we remember being called as kids are related to looks. Sadly, not much has changed for our daughters. A UK government study found that the most common bullying experience for students today is related to appearance. In elementary schools, bullies focus on physical characteristics such as red hair, being too tall or too small, fat or skinny. In high school, other aspects of appearance come under attack: her waistline, skin, haircut or 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. The US government’s StopBullying website defines it as “unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, 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 bullying expert in the UK who advises teens and parents on the issue. “Teenagers are exploring their identity through how they look, and they’re learning how society reacts to that.”

### Helping your daughter deal with bullying

You may be agonizing 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?

These questions might get her to open up. Perhaps also 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 do so 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 previously mentioned.

### Being there

Dealing with bullying can take time, so be patient and try to understand 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.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF BULLYING?

Experts recommend keeping alert for the following indicators of bullying:

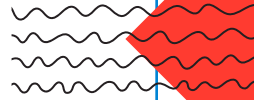
- > **Change in behaviour or emotional state:** Has she suddenly become more withdrawn or aggressive than usual?
- > **Physical signs:** Unexplained injuries, such as cuts and bruises or damaged clothes.
- > **Avoiding school:** Making excuses and feigning illness.
- > **Lack of interest:** Especially in the things she normally enjoys.

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

- > **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.

# The Beat Bullying Action Checklist:



## Show your daughter she's not alone:

Talk to her about your teenage experience. Maybe you were teased about a particular feature but now recognize it's a part of what makes you special.

## Work together:

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

## Reassure her:

Tell her there is nothing wrong with the way she looks and that you admire what makes her an individual.

## Explain:

Help her understand the reasons why people bully others. In some cases, bullies feel emboldened by the anonymity of social media. It's also important to remind her that it's okay to unplug and walk away from situations that can be uncomfortable online. Other times, bullies can be experiencing problems at home or other factors that cause them to lash out. If your daughter is focusing on specific negative comments from bullies, help her create internal statements that lessen the negative impact of those comments. Help her to see how her happy family life is contributing to her confidence, and to have empathy for others who may not be so fortunate.

## Acknowledge:

Validate your daughter's feelings. If she feels she's being undermined by taunts, gestures or other behavior from people, 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 takes place. If she's being picked on at certain times or places, get her to recognize 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 on her own, 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 needed.

## Talk to the school yourself:

If she isn't willing to talk to her teacher alone, consider talking to the teacher yourself. Most schools have an anti-bullying strategy and will know how to approach the situation. But make sure your daughter knows whom 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 the matter independently, with your solid support in the background.

## Empower her:

There are many reasons why people bully: They may have been bullied themselves or have low self-esteem. To attempt to understand a bully's situation and ultimately stand up to him or her 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 counselors who can help her improve how she's feeling and devise strategies to cope.





## LET'S GET STARTED!

- Keep the lines of communication open with your daughter so she can talk about what she's going through. Does she know other girls who have 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 in some cases the things a bully harps on can reflect his or her own insecurities. It's important for your daughter to remember that many of her peers – even a bully – may be experiencing self-doubt and that she's not alone
- Would it help 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 realize the impact of their words. Of course, robust discussions and gentle teasing are a part of being a family. They can help girls develop and explore their opinions, and build resilience to the criticisms that are a part of their everyday lives. However, it's worth thinking twice about what builds character – and what diminishes confidence.

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

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

**"Soon you'll be bigger than your mom!"**

**"Oh, that puppy fat is so cute."**

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

**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 experience more depression than girls who aren’t teased,” says research psychologist and body-image expert Dr. Phillipa Diedrichs.

On the flip side, 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, may be damaging to your daughter’s body confidence. Taking action can help prevent this from becoming a family problem.

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, such as confronting the person making the remarks: Let him or her know how the teasing makes your daughter feel.

**“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...”**

**Dr. Phillipa Diedrichs**  
body-image expert

Suki, mom 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 toward nurturing and protecting her body confidence.



## The Family Banter Action Checklist:

Here is a commonsense checklist to help you keep the family comedians under control and stop your daughter from 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 continues to tease your daughter (or tease someone else in front of your daughter) about her appearance or body, consider speaking with that person 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. A different approach is required for dealing with an adult family member compared to a child.

### Explain the situation:

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

## LET'S GET STARTED!

- What are some comments family members told your daughter that really upset her? Is there anything she is 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 you and your daughter

A translation tool to share with your daughter to aid communication and 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 is 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 well-being, her reactions suggest you're speaking a different language. Which is why we've created the What the ?! Parent Translator especially for your daughter, to help her understand what you're really trying to say.

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



# 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 might hear:

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

What they might 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.

Parents say:

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

You might hear:

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

What they might 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 that you're spending time with friends, so long as you make time for your family, too. They're genuinely interested in what you're up to, so why not tell them the highlights of your day?

# What the?!

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

Parents say:

**"What did you have for lunch today?"**

You might hear:

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

What they might 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.

Parents say:

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

You might hear:

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

What they might mean:

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

Parents say:

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

You might hear:

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

What they might mean:

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

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.

## The 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 space to bring up the topic on her own, letting you know which scenario 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 the future.

### Keep talking:

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

## LET'S GET STARTED!

- > Share the What 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 from 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 enjoy her food and break the bad habit of teen dieting.

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 labeling certain foods as "good" and others as "bad" isn't helpful – it creates too many rules that dictate your relationship with food and encourages disordered eating. It's also usually wrong. Low-fat foods can be loaded with sugar and fillers to give taste when a normal, fattier version would be nutritionally better."

## Girls and teenage diets

For teenage girls, it's common for insecurities to play out through food. Most 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 to 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 fluctuate wildly. If your daughter is doing this, try explaining that it could backfire and she may end up gaining more weight as a result.

## 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 Orbach. Making all foods allowable and moving away from the idea of good versus bad foods makes it easier to make wise choices.

That was the message 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 affect just weight. Good nutrition does improve your body on the outside (skin and hair, for example), but according to an article published in The British Journal of Psychiatry, it can also improve your body on the inside, boosting energy levels. The article also found that eating a lot of processed foods increased the likelihood of depression, whereas those who ate more whole foods 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 attitudes 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.



## The Balanced Diet Action Checklist:

Use this action checklist to help your daughter – and yourself – forget about bad food and start enjoying the health benefits of a 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 all that food, but it didn't sit well with me. I think I really wanted just a bit of it.*

### Ditch fad diets:

They often rely on restricting foods, meaning we miss out on vital nutritional requirements. We tend to crave anything we try to cut out, 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!

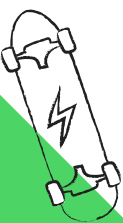
- > Use the action checklist to start a conversation about which foods your daughter thinks are bad and which are good. What made her decide which foods were bad?
- > Encourage her to talk to friends about the subject. What did she learn from hearing what they had to say about food?
- > Would your daughter be confident enough to ask a science or gym teacher at school about the subject?



# 9-Show your daughter the benefits of physical activity

The benefits of an active lifestyle 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 running shoes, but, according to the UK National Health Service, the positive benefits of physical activity include boosting self-esteem, improving your mood, sleep quality and energy levels, and reducing your risk of stress.



That goes for your daughter, too. She doesn't have to be a team captain or a 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 regularly physically active, she will likely 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 sports. Furthermore, positive body confidence means people feel more comfortable being physically active, which improves both physical and mental health.

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

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

**"My daughter agrees that exercising and feeling good is far more important than starving yourself and being a size zero,"**

**Martine**  
mother

### Adolescence is a time for new activities

Experts recognize it's not uncommon for girls to reject activities they previously enjoyed once 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 your daughter wants to do and outline the benefits.

"We've tried various physical activity classes together and talked 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 10K 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:

Finding common ground on a physical activity you both like can 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 socializing while she is physically active, which is usually more fun. And if she's having fun exercising, she's more likely to stick with it.

### It's about a state of mind:

Talk to your daughter about the strengths that successful athletes need, including mental toughness, fine-tuning particular muscle groups, self-discipline, determination and leadership skills. They aren't all physical!

### Show her that all athletes' bodies are different:

Their shapes will be determined by what their body needs to do to excel at their sport. That's the critical factor here, not the way they look.

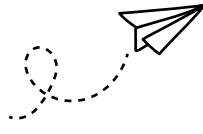
### Keep your daughter focused on how she feels, not how she looks:

If she starts criticizing her body, help her keep a balanced view focused on health and overall performance. Aspiring to a "perfect" athlete's body is not helpful.

## LET'S GET STARTED!

- > Start a conversation with your daughter about how she feels when she exercises.
- > Working out can be just as much of a mental health exercise as a physical one. 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 that exercise should always be fun.
- > Would your daughter have the confidence to write to athletes she admires to ask about how they feel when they exercise?

# Over to you



We hope that this resource has been 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.

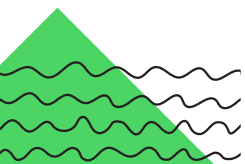


Most important, keep talking to your daughter about what she thinks and how she feels. Doing so will foster trust and help her see that you respect and love her as a mature, unique individual.

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 [dove.com/selfesteem](https://dove.com/selfesteem).**







# References

## Love yourself

Mirror, mirror – Social Issues Research Centre  
Centre for Appearance Research at the University of the West  
of England, Bristol

## 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

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

No Place for Bullying – UK government's Office for Standards in  
Education, Children's Services and Skills  
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 a study  
published in 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

*To protect privacy we've changed the names of the people whose stories  
we tell on these pages.*

# Other resources and inspiration

## Films – for your daughter

### Brave

(2012) (US: PG) – Scottish princess Merida chooses to defy her mother when she's told she must give up her interests in archery and horseback riding and marry instead to help unify neighboring clans. Things don't quite go according to plan, and Merida must find a way to fix it.

### Inside Out

(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. Her emotions – Joy, Fear, Anger, Disgust and Sadness – together try to help her navigate the highs and lows of adolescence.



## Documentaries – for you

### America The Beautiful

(2007) (Edited version, US: PG-13) – Tackling America's obsession with beauty, this film mainly chronicles a 12-year-old model's coming of age in the fashion industry. It also touches on plastic surgery, celebrity worship, airbrushed advertising and human insecurity.

### America the Beautiful 2: The Thin Commandments

(2011) (US: Not rated) – The team behind the 2007 documentary America the Beautiful tackles dieting, obesity, and eating disorders in the US. The film analyzes our obsession with food and diet fads, and includes the opinions of medical experts in the field.

### Beauty Mark

(2008) (US: Not rated) – This documentary film takes an alarming, infuriating and at times humorous look at the forces that shape our perceptions of beauty. Psychotherapist and former world-class triathlete Diane Israel tells her story while interviewing other champion athletes, body builders, fashion models and inner-city teens about their experiences relating to self-image.

### Miss Representation

(2011) (US: Not rated) – Actress and activist Jennifer Siebel Newsom directs this documentary that uncovers the reasons why there is a distinct lack of women in high-powered positions around the world. The film 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-confidence of young girls around the world.

## 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 girls-only workshops Ask Elizabeth, which she parlayed into a book that examines all the tough parts of growing up. Part scrapbook, including entries from real teenagers sharing their advice and experiences, and part self-help resource featuring a panel of experts, Ask Elizabeth 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 – This in-depth look on the effects of media and pop culture on teenage girls stresses the losing game girls play when they compare themselves to others and try to live up to highly promoted, unrealistic body images. Brashich emphasizes 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 – The writer and former Miss America contestant looks at body issues about which girls may be too embarrassed to bring up with their parents or doctor. Covering acne, weight and other issues that can knock a girl's self-esteem, the book 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 types.

## 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

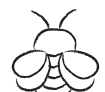
(2009) by Susie Orbach – Some 30 years after publishing *Fat Is a Feminist Issue*, Orbach argues that the way we view our bodies has become a mirror of how we view ourselves. This raises fundamental questions about how we arrived here.

### Skin Deep

(2004) by Catherine Barry – A novel about a young woman who believes that if only she were beautiful and sexy, she would find the happiness she desperately craves. Can happiness really be achieved 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, words and actions, you can appreciate your body more.

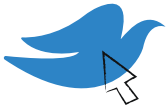


# Our partners

## World Association of Girl Guides & Girl Scouts

Dove has teamed up with this association dedicated to girls and young women to help realize our joint vision of a world free from appearance-related anxiety. Together, we have created Free Being Me, a brand new self-esteem-building badge program for girls around the world. Find out more at:

[free-being-me.com](http://free-being-me.com)





# Notes

A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing notes.



