

Positive Self-Image Facts for Parents

Kicking Things Off With a Healthy Self-Image

A child begins to develop beliefs and attitudes at birth. As a parent, you have an important role in shaping those attitudes. Here are some tips to help your child build a positive self-image and self-esteem through regular physical activity!

Let's Start by *bouncing around* some definitions...

Self-image describes how an individual sees his or her characteristics and abilities and how an individual evaluates him/herself. Self-image is complex and develops over time as a person gets older and interacts with others. Part of what influences self-image is self-esteem.

Self-esteem is an emotion and is defined as how a person feels about himself or herself. It determines how valuable, lovable, worthwhile and capable we feel we are based on relationships with parents, peers and significant others; talents; interests; physical/athletic ability; physical appearance; and intellectual and academic abilities.

A word about body image

Body image is the mental picture an individual has of his or her body - what it looks like in the mirror and what he or she thinks it looks like to others. Body image plays a part in forming one's self-image, and can affect self-esteem.

Beginning at birth, body image development is based on contacts with the people and world around us. Therefore, parents are key to helping children develop healthy attitudes for life. Body image is shaped by a number of factors including comments from others, harassment, the media, and how the individual feels. For example, according to the National Eating Disorders Information Centre, from as early as age four, girls know the importance placed on body image. At age four, they have an understanding of physical shapes, by age five they prefer certain figures, and by age six, girls develop negative feelings regarding large types.

Children need to know that healthy bodies come in many different shapes and sizes and have different abilities so that they will respect and

value people's differences. Accepting that everyone is different will help children accept and love their own bodies. Having a healthy body image promotes positive self-esteem, and vice versa. You can encourage both by helping children to recognise their **many** positive characteristics, not just those related to their outward appearance.

According to Dietitians of Canada, here are some ways you can encourage your child to have a more positive body image:

- Try to be aware of the messages you send about your body and the comments you make about other people's bodies.
- Enjoy the pleasure of healthy eating with your child and avoid referring to foods as good or bad.
- Don't let your own self-esteem be measured by your weight. Avoid using a scale on a regular basis.
- Find fun ways to be active with your child to help him or her experience the joy of physical activity.

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The Role of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the foundation of psychological well-being. Young people with high self-esteem tend to be less anxious, withdrawn, and pessimistic about their abilities. The research indicates they are less susceptible to interpersonal problems, conforming to social pressure, poor body image, and eating disorders.

Building Positive Self-image and Self-esteem Involves:

- Providing a nurturing, safe and loving environment for your child
- Helping your child develop a well-rounded impression of him/herself by highlighting his/her many positive qualities and personal traits
- Helping your child develop skills in many areas including education, sports, personal interests, and hobbies
- Avoiding the focus on body shape or size as a way to feel good
- Helping your child feel successful and important
- Providing positive feedback and cheering his/her accomplishments
- Showing you have confidence in him/her and focusing on the positive
- Being aware of what contributes to self-esteem in boys and girls and dealing with it accordingly. A girl's self-esteem is often linked to physical appearance; a boy's self-esteem is likely to be linked to talents and abilities
- Being positive about yourself and accepting compliments that point out your strengths and abilities. Give compliments in the same way to your child
- Avoiding use of criticism when your child makes a mistake. When a child does something wrong, make it clear that you dislike the behaviour but you still love your child
- Making eye contact while talking to your child, which tells your child that he/she is important to you
- Being sensitive to your child's feelings and not embarrassing him/her
- Listening carefully, without judging; showing interest; and paying attention
- Respecting people's differences and recognizing their strengths and accomplishments.



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Physical Activity and Self-esteem

- There is a strong connection between physical skills and self-esteem among very young children. While adults base their feelings about themselves on their physical, social, family, personal, school/work, and moral-ethical experiences, the very young child is most likely to think about their worth based on family and physical experiences. For example, when a child says “watch me”, s/he is often demonstrating his/her ability to perform a physical skill.
- Positive self-esteem is built through a child’s belief that s/he has the ability to perform skills and the family support to be active. This in turn boosts her/his enjoyment and serves to encourage her/him to continue to participate in physical activity. See the section below for ways to support your child in physical activity.
- A child believes s/he is successful at physical activity skills when s/he feels able to perform simple tasks (such as making contact with the ball); is trying hard; is learning a new athletic skill; is enjoying the activity and is receiving positive feedback and reinforcement from parents, teachers and coaches.
- Children learn by watching their parents and others around them. Parents and teachers, therefore, can influence how a child feels about his/her physical skills by providing physical activity opportunities, giving positive feedback and encouragement, and being an active role model.
- In general, studies show that physical activity influences self-esteem because it:
 - helps decrease feelings of anxiety, tension and depression
 - is related to a general sense of hopefulness and contributes to feelings of well-being
 - is a way to express anger, aggression and happiness
 - is a means for self-discovery and socializing
 - enhances creativity, problem-solving, and academic performance
 - improves self-discipline
 - improves fitness levels which are related to positive mental health
 - has a positive impact on behaviour and healthy lifestyle choices in later years, such as the decision to smoke, drink alcohol and take drugs.

When providing physical activity opportunities, be sure to:

- Get involved! Playing together strengthens your family’s bond. It provides time to talk, laugh and to get to know each other better. You are the most important role model that your child has.
- Make them fun – let each family member choose an activity he/she would like to do and limit the competition which can be stressful to some children.
- Make them social – invite friends and neighbours over to play. Plan an outing to a public place such as a bowling alley, local park or conservation area.
- Keep them interesting – kids love variety. Choose different activities to do each week or each season. Try a new activity, take lessons together, register your child in lessons, participate in a charity walk.
- Set small but achievable goals – challenge your family to master a skill, finish a hike, learn a new sport, or increase the time they are able to be active.
- Incorporate activities that emphasize basic motor skill development, such as running, rolling, climbing, throwing, catching, and kicking. Plan the activity in short bursts with frequent breaks.
- Limit sedentary pastimes, such as watching TV and using the computer.
- Consider a wide variety of physical activity opportunities. For example, inviting your child to do chores around the house can be a fun activity and s/he will feel proud about having helped you!

Physical Activity Facts for Parents

Have a Ball with Physical Activity

Participating in daily physical activity is a great way to have fun as a family while establishing an active lifestyle that will keep kids healthy, well...thy, and wise! Learning physical skills should be nurtured and supported in the same way as language and social skills.

Did You Know?

Daily physical activity:

- Makes the heart, lungs, muscles, and bones stronger
- Increases energy
- Improves stamina, flexibility and coordination
- Helps improve sleeping and eating habits
- Helps maintain a healthy weight
- Helps us feel good about ourselves
- Reduces anxiety and depression and improves one's ability to deal with stress
- Provides opportunities to socialize and make friendships
- Provides opportunities to develop motor/sports skills, lifeskills and to practice self-discipline
- Helps increase concentration, memory, creativity, and problem-solving skills/abilities and enhances learning
- Helps with language skills and concepts (for example, learning the difference between near/far, left/right, over/under, front/behind and above/below) and teaches about speed, distance, height, shape, colour, direction, and position
- Helps children speak and listen to one another. When they invent games on the playground, they're using their vocabulary and learning lessons in communication
- Decreases the likelihood of using tobacco, alcohol and other drugs in the teen years and beyond

Children who develop basic movement skills and feel confident in their ability to use those skills are more likely to choose to be physically active at all stages in life.

The best time for basic movement skill development is during the early years.

Despite the amazing number of benefits that children receive through daily physical activity, over half of our children are not active enough for healthy growth and development.

- Children today are 40% less active than they were 30 years ago.
- Forty percent of Canadian children already have at least one risk factor for heart disease – reduced fitness due to physical inactivity.
- In 2002, Ontarians aged two and up spent almost 21 hours a week watching TV. Children between the ages of two and 11 specifically, watched an average of 14.5 hours a week. This did not include time spent playing video and computer games or using the Internet.
- The amount of time Canadian children spend playing video games is among the highest in the world.
- In Canada, the increasing prevalence of obesity is the fastest growing epidemic of our time. Between 1981 and 1996, there were dramatic increases in overweight and obesity in children aged seven to 13.
- Type II diabetes, once known as “adult-onset diabetes” is an increasingly serious problem among children and adolescents. It is closely linked with both obesity and physical inactivity.

“Because of the increasing rates of obesity, unhealthy eating habits, and physical inactivity, we may see the first generation that will be less healthy and have a shorter life expectancy than their parents”
(United States Surgeon General)

Physical Activity Facts for Parents

Have a Ball with Physical Activity

How active should young children be?

While no Canadian recommendations currently exist, the United States has produced Physical Activity Guidelines for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education recommends the following:

Infants should:

- be physically active from the beginning of life.
- spend part of their day with a caregiver or parent who not only holds and rocks them, but also plays games such as peekaboo and pat-a-cake.
- be encouraged to explore their surroundings, develop skills that help them move and use their large muscles.
- be with parents/caregivers in safe places that allow them to be active and do not restrict movement for long periods of time.

Toddlers should:

- accumulate at least 30 minutes of daily structured physical activity (activities that you direct or do with your child, such as riding a tricycle or playing an active game, or participating in lessons or organized classes).
- get at least 60 minutes, and up to several hours of daily, unstructured physical activity (supervised free time to play actively on their own or with others).
- avoid being inactive for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.

Preschoolers should:

- accumulate at least 60 minutes of daily structured physical activity.
- get at least 60 minutes, and up to several hours of daily, unstructured physical activity.
- avoid being inactive for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.

Other goals:

- Toddlers and preschoolers should have safe indoor and outdoor areas in which to try large muscle activities, such as running and jumping and more complex movements.
- Babies and young children should not be left in strollers, playpens, and infant seats, for several hours at a time. Doing so may delay their ability to roll over, crawl, walk and even learn. It can also lead to inactive choices later on, putting them at risk of becoming overweight or obese.
- Promoting and encouraging the enjoyment of physical activity at an early age will help to ensure healthy development and later participation in physical activity.



Physical Activity Facts for Parents

Have a Ball with Physical Activity

Physical Activity for All Abilities

If you have a child with a disability, physical activity provides many benefits. According to the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability, regular physical activity:

- Improves physical stamina and self-confidence providing greater independence
- Helps control weight and increases strength and flexibility, helping the person who uses a wheelchair or other mobility aid to transfer and get around with less effort, making the person more mobile
- Improves circulation and reduces blood pooling and swelling in the lower limbs
- Improves posture making the individual less susceptible to the aches and pains that can accompany long periods of sitting.

In order to ensure that games and activities are accessible to a child with a disability:

- Use lighter, softer, larger balls or substitute beanbags for balls
- Choose shorter, lighter bats and racquets
- Choose larger goals or target areas
- Partially deflate balls for dribbling and kicking activities
- Substitute wheeling for running and rolling a ball off a lap for kicking
- Simplify games by having players drop the ball and catch it rather than asking that they bounce it consecutively
- Use a smaller playing area to make it easier for players of all skill levels to participate
- Lower the target or move it closer to the players.



Physical Activity Facts for Parents

Have a Ball with Physical Activity

Twenty Tips for Having a Ball with Your Young Child

1. Be a role model. Participate in active pursuits such as riding a bike, gardening, doing an exercise video at home. Make daily routines active by walking to day-care, school, or the store, using the stairs, parking in the furthest spot in a parking lot.
2. Teach your child that physical activity is important and fun rather than a chore.
3. Find ways to be active together. Look for "Parent & Tot" classes; participate in family swims or open gym times at your local recreation centre; try new activities, learn a new skill or take lessons together. Make every experience a positive one.
4. Limit the amount of time that your child watches television or plays videos or computer games to one hour each day.
5. Schedule a regular time throughout the day for physical activity. Find places for your child to be active – in your home, outside your home and in your community.
6. Create indoor and outdoor play areas where rolling, climbing, jumping, and tumbling are allowed and encouraged.
7. Balance your child's day with physical activities that are informal and unstructured, such as playing outside, riding push toys, helping to clean the house or dancing to music.
8. Organize a weekly "parent and child" active living group.
9. Choose a child care setting that builds structured physical activity into the daily program schedule.
10. Choose toys or equipment that promote physical activity such as balls, bean bags, large, soft racquets, a large soft baseball bat, skipping ropes, hula hoops, a parachute, a plastic bowling set, plastic pails...and of course storage bins to keep them organized. Lightweight, usually plastic, equipment is inexpensive and a safer option for younger children. Old clothes and hats are great to encourage imaginative play.
11. Use physical activity, rather than food, as a reward. Refrain from taking physical activity time away from your child as a means of discipline - this is likely the time s/he needs to run around or go outside.
12. Dress your child in clothing that doesn't restrict his/her play and may get dirty.
13. Help your child learn basic skills that will help him/her participate in physical activity and games for his/her lifetime such as running, jumping, throwing, catching, and kicking.
14. Provide your child with regular opportunities to learn lifetime skills such as swimming, cycling, dance, gymnastics, walking, jogging, and skating.
15. Praise your child when he or she is active. Your approval and encouragement is very important. Take a picture of your child being active and hang it on the fridge or wall.
16. Go on active outings and take active vacations.
17. Choose fiction or non-fiction books that depict physical activity in a positive way. Children may even be able to act out parts of the story.
18. Keep safe by ensuring that your child is wearing the proper protective gear including a helmet, knee pads, elbow pads, and sunscreen. Dress appropriately for the weather and always carry water.
19. Organize active birthday parties. Go swimming, skating, to the local recreation or gymnastics centre, or use your imagination and make up active games at home.
20. Walk, climb, run, throw, build, dance, toss, hit balls, kick balls, hop, jump, roll, dig, shovel...Get Moving!

Where to go for more information

- Public Health Unit • Parks and Recreation Departments
- Ontario Early Years Centres • Community parenting programs
 - Child Care Centres • Family Resource Centres
 - Community Health Centres • Library

Healthy Weight Facts for Parents

Let's Not Drop the Ball When it Comes to Promoting Healthy Weights

For both children and adults, maintaining a healthy weight is important to overall health and well-being. Yet, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002), being overweight due to physical inactivity and poor nutrition is one of the greatest health challenges of this century.

Did you know...

- In 2003, almost one out of every two Ontario adults was overweight or obese.
- Between 1981 and 1996, the number of boys who were overweight increased from 15% to 28.8% and girls went from 15% to 23.6%.
- The number of obese boys nearly tripled from 5% to 13.5% and more than doubled in girls from 5% to 11.8%.
- In Canada, obesity is the fastest growing epidemic of our time.
- In 2000/2001, obesity cost Canada's healthcare system an estimated \$4.3 billion.
- For non-smokers, physical inactivity, poor nutrition and overweight are the leading causes of chronic health problems in Ontario today.
- Children who are overweight or obese are at higher risk for several health problems including asthma, sleeping difficulties, bone and joint problems, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and blood lipid levels, high blood pressure, depression, poor body image, and low self esteem.
- There is something we can do...

Prevention should be our *goal!*

It is much easier to encourage healthy habits when children are very young, than when they are in their teens and adult years. Since it is more difficult for adults who are obese to lose weight, preventing children from becoming obese is very important to their long-term health.



Healthy Weight Facts for Parents

Let's Not Drop the Ball When it Comes to Promoting Healthy Weights

A word about body image

Body image is the mental picture an individual has of his or her body - what it looks like in the mirror and what he or she thinks it looks like to others. Body image plays a part in forming one's self-image, and can affect self-esteem. Children become aware of body shapes and sizes at a very early age. They see and hear things on TV, they learn from older siblings and friends, and they listen to you.

What can you do to encourage a healthy body image?

- Regardless of your child's weight, love them unconditionally.
- Do not talk about dieting and do not make negative comments about your own body.
- Avoid using words such as "big", "skinny", "fat", "clumsy", "hippy".
- Discourage teasing and put-downs. Let children know that making comments about people's weight, shape or size is not acceptable.
- Praise your children for how they behave, how they treat others and what they can accomplish, rather than how they look.
- Do not focus on your child's weight by weighing them at home. Measuring a child's weight and height is a more useful tool for doctors to monitor growth and development.
- Encourage children to focus on their abilities rather than on their appearance. Help them identify things they like about themselves.
- Teach children that people come in all shapes, weights, sizes and colours.

Energy Balance ... a juggling act!

As a society, we have lost the balance between the energy we take in and the energy we use, which is key to a healthy weight. Just when Ontarians are faced with more food choices, more processed foods, and large food portions, we have taken physical activity out of our lives, by replacing it with remote controls, computers and video games.

(Dr. S. Basrur, 2004, CMOH Report Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives)

A person's weight is determined by the energy they take in (the calories in the food they eat) and the energy they put out (the calories expended). When people consistently take in more food energy than they burn each day (through physical activity, as well as the body's daily use of energy to sustain life, such as pumping blood, breathing, and digestion), they will gain weight. A number of factors affect body weight including our genes, family background, income level, culture, and surroundings.

Healthy Weight Facts for Parents

Let's Not Drop the Ball When it Comes to Promoting Healthy Weights

As a parent, here's how you can help your child reach and stay at a healthy weight.

Physical Activity

- Be a role model by being active for a minimum of 30 minutes, most days of the week.
- Encourage infants to explore their environment, develop movement skills and use their large muscles. Avoid keeping them still for long periods of time.
- Toddlers should get at least 30 minutes of structured (planned play directed by an adult, or lessons) physical activity each day, while preschoolers should get 60 minutes each day. Furthermore, toddlers and preschoolers should get at least 60 minutes and up to several hours per day of unstructured physical activity and should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.
- Park the stroller or wagon at home! If you must take one, let your child out to push it.
- Make physical activity part of the daily routine. Avoid taking the car on short trips or to do errands. Teach your child to use the stairs instead of elevators.
- Enrol your child in lessons that will provide them with lifelong skills such as swimming, skating and dancing.
- Choose toys that promote physical activity, such as balls and tricycles and plan active birthday parties.
- Encourage your child to help with easy chores around the house such as dusting, raking leaves or shovelling snow (with child-size equipment).
- Promote activities that use large muscle groups, such as walking, dancing and cycling.
- Limit screen time (television, video games and Internet) to one hour or less per day.
- Stress the fun in physical activity. Play games as a family, invite friends to the playground, climb trees, put on music and dance in the house.

Healthy Eating

- Begin the day with a healthy breakfast, containing three out of the four food groups from *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*.
- Eat meals together as a family as much as possible.
- Serve healthy snacks including vegetables and fruit, yogurt, cheese, cereal, and whole grain bread. Have these foods available and in a spot where children can see them.
- Serve your child water and milk and limit drinks with added sugars such as soft drinks, fruit drinks and sport drinks. 100% juice is a healthy choice for children but should still be limited to one 50 to 125 ml serving per day.
- Do not use food as a reward or as a means of discipline.
- Talk about food in a positive way and reinforce the healthy things it supports in the body, such as "drinking milk makes your bones strong".
- Involve children in planning and preparing meals and snacks.
- Balance higher fat foods with lower fat foods. For example, avoid having higher fat choices such as pepperoni pizza, hot dogs, and chicken nuggets all the same week. When higher fat choices are served, balance them with more vegetables and fruit.
- Send your child to day care or school with healthy meals and snacks. For ideas, visit www.dietitians.ca.
- Get a copy of *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating and Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating – Focus on Preschoolers*, from your local Public Health Unit, or through Health Canada by calling (613) 954-5995, or by writing to Publications, Health Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K9, or by visiting www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/food_guide_preschoolers_e.html.

For more information:

- Dietitians of Canada. *Healthy Start for Life* (2003). Visit www.dietitians.ca/healthystart
- Government of Ontario. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (2004) *Chief Medical Officer of Health Report. Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives*. Visit www.health.gov.on.ca or call 1-800-461-2036.

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