

What Messages Have You Received about Body Size and Shape?

Each day we receive numerous messages from the media, family, friends, and society about what our body should look like and the ideal size. It may be helpful to explore the messages you have received about health, body size, and attractiveness. How do they impact your mental health and your relationship with your body? Take a moment and think about the messages you have received about your body.

Questions to reflect on:

- **What are the messages I have heard about size, health, and attractiveness?**
 - What messages did I hear about body size, health, and attractiveness as a kid?
 - What messages do I currently hear from my friends and family about size?
 - What messages have I heard about people in different body sizes and shapes?
 - How does society and my culture affect my beliefs around health and size?
- **How do those messages affect me and my behaviors?**
 - How do I think about my own body size?
 - What assumptions do I make about others based on their size or appearance? Does that assumption affect how I treat them?
 - What are some things I wish I knew more about to improve my relationship with my body?
- **How do these messages affect my relationship with exercise or body movement?**
 - What messages have I received about exercise or movement?
 - How do I define exercise? Do I have to sweat and get my heart rate up for it to count? Do I need to work out for a certain amount time?

Small Steps to Being Size-Inclusive

People are meant to be all shapes and sizes. All body sizes can experience weight bias but higher-weight people are the typical targets of prejudice and discrimination.^{3,4,5} Weight discrimination and stigma are associated with disordered eating behaviors, increased levels of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and numerous other physical and psychological consequences.^{2,6,7} Taking a size-inclusive approach can assist you in having a better relationship with your body and be protective from harmful messages that you may receive about size, health, and attractiveness. Here are some small steps to assist you as you begin this journey:¹

1. Accept and respect that there are diverse body shapes and sizes and reject idealizing or condemning specific weights.
2. Encourage yourself and your peers not to make judgments or assumptions about others' bodies, such as "You would be hot if you lost weight." or "Wow they need a burger."
3. Begin to acknowledge that exercise or movement happens in many different ways; there is no one right way to do it. Walking, stretching, cleaning your dorm room, or having a 10 minute dance party in the kitchen are all valid forms of movement.¹

References

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