

Ten Essential Lessons to Build Body Esteem ©

Promoting Health as a Value versus Size as a Goal

To begin, accept what is *not in your control*:

- 1) Accept your body's genetic predisposition. All bodies are wired to be fatter, thinner, or in between. This includes fatter in some places and thinner in others. Regardless of efforts to change it, over time your body will fight to maintain or resume the shape it was born to be. You may force your body into sizes and shapes that you prefer, but you can't beat Mother Nature without a tremendous cost.
- 2) Understand that all bodies change developmentally in ways that are simply not in your control through healthy means. You may positively influence changes of puberty, pregnancy and lactation, menopause, and aging by making healthy lifestyle choices, but you will not "control" these changes, no matter how much you try.
- 3) Never "diet." Hunger is an internally regulated drive and demands to be satisfied. If you limit what is needed to satiate hunger completely, it will backfire, triggering preoccupation with food and ultimately an overeating or compulsive eating response. You may lose weight in the short run, but 95% of weight that is lost through dieting is regained, plus added pounds. Dieters who go off their diets only to binge are not "weak willed." They are mammals whose built-in starvation response has kicked in who are going after what has been restricted. Clear evidence has been available on this since the early 1950's, but most people are not aware of the predictable, counterproductive results of "dieting."

Then focus your attention and energy on what is within your power to achieve:

- 4) Satisfy hunger completely with plenty of wholesome, nutrient rich foods chosen from all food groups - *eat well!* In today's world, surrounded by taste stimulating, cheap, cleverly advertised, readily available, low-nutrient entertainment foods, learning to *feed* your body versus merely "eat" is an essential difference.
- 5) Limit sedentary entertainment. Move aerobically, if possible, on a regular basis. Everyone who is not medically inhibited, regardless of size, can and should develop a reasonable level of fitness and maintain it throughout the life cycle.
- 6) Understand that if you eat well and maintain an active lifestyle over time, your best, natural weight will be revealed. Set a goal to eat well and be active. Don't be swayed by whether or not this makes you thin. Healthy, well-fed, active bodies are diverse in size and shape, from fat to thin and everything in between. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise, not even your doctor, who may be caught in unhealthy cultural myths about weight.
- 7) Choose role models that reflect a realistic standard against which you can feel good about yourself. If the "Ugly Duckling" had continued to compare herself to the ducks she'd *still* be miserable, no matter how beautifully she developed.
- 8) Maintain your integrity as a human being. In spite of advertisements seducing you to believe that "image is everything," *never* forget that how you look is only one part of who you are. Develop a sense of identity based on all the many things you can do, the values you believe in, and the person that you are deep inside.
- 9) Become media savvy. Educate yourself about the hidden power of advertisements. Advertisers spend tons of money on strategies specifically designed to make you feel there is something wrong with you. Why? If they *first* advertise an unrealistic standard of beauty that leaves you feeling deficient by comparison, a product that promises to improve your condition is an easy sale. Don't be "sold" this bill of goods.
- 10) Encourage your friends and co-workers to join you in developing a healthy, realistic body image. Use the collective energy your group would have spent on hating your bodies to make the world a better place. Help the next generation to develop healthy body image attitudes and learn positive lifestyle habits too.