

# *Dr. Anna Bennett Memorial Mental Health Team*

Presents

## The Mental Health Corner

# THE BODY AND MENTAL HEALTH

TODAY, I WILL  
**THANK MY BODY,**  
NOT CRITICIZE IT.

**Body Image** - defined as the thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors around one's physical appearance. It also includes how one senses and controls their body as they move and how one physically experiences one's body. It is something that all of us develop early in childhood as we start to become aware of our appearance and seek to gain social acceptance first from our caregivers, peers, and the wider society in which we live. One's culture, society, and personal beliefs all contribute to how one experiences and thinks about their body.

**Body Acceptance** - accepting ones body regardless of not being completely satisfied with all aspects of it.

**Body Positivity** - focuses on cultivating acceptance towards a positive body image through unconditinoal self love.

**Body Neutrality** - does not involve constant positivity. It is an acknowledgment and appreciation of all the things the body can do, regardless of what it looks like.

**Health at Every Size (HAES)** - a healthcare and nutrition framework that promotes healthy behaviors instead of weight loss. HAES is based on five principles:

Weight inclusivity: Respecting the diversity of body shapes and sizes

Eating for well-being: Eating intuitively is more sustainable and healthful than dieting

Life-enhancing movement: Movement should be accessible to all bodies

Respectful care: Developing empathy for the many factors that influence health

Health enhancement: Prioritizing health gain over weight loss

**Negative Body Image** - involves a distorted perception for one's shape and physical appearance. Negative body image (or body dissatisfaction) involves feelings of shame, anxiety, and self-consciousness. Additionally, body dissatisfaction includes perceptions of one's skin color, physical features, hair texture and color, ability status, gender identity and expression, and muscularity. People who experience high levels of body dissatisfaction feel their bodies are flawed in comparison to others, and these folks are more likely to suffer from feelings of depression, isolation, low self-esteem, and eating disorders.

### **Body Image and Mental Health**

Issues with your body do not start and end with physical appearance. The mental aspect of having poor body image can create a toxic environment. A person who thinks they are too overweight or not muscular enough is only part of the problem. More issues arise when people begin to second guess their worth.

For example, you may not like how you physically look and allow yourself to think negatively about how you are not good enough or not attractive enough. Having negative thoughts about your body image can create a whole host of problems, including the following feelings and actions:

Anxiety

Body dysmorphia

Depression

Eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia)

Feelings of shame or guilt

MY WORTH IS  
**NOT DEFINED**  
BY MY BODY OR  
APPEARANCE.

# *Dr. Anna Bennett Memorial Mental Health Team*

Presents

## The Mental Health Corner

# THE BODY AND MENTAL HEALTH

### **Body Image and Mental Health** *(continued)*

Financial strain

Guilt

Negative self talk

Poor self esteem

Preoccupation with weight/body type

### **How to Improve Body Image**

The first step in improving your body image is to identify the triggers of your negative thoughts and feelings. For example, feelings of guilt should be explored to find the source. Once identified, you can learn from your experiences by allowing compassion and self-gratitude instead of being critical.

Try not to compare yourself to others. It may take time and effort, but it is important to learn to appreciate your body for what it truly is – and not what it can or should be.

People with a positive outlook tend to view themselves in a more positive way and free of judgment.

Improving your body image is not as simple as losing or gaining weight – it is still possible for people to be unhappy with how they look if they are thin. The more important part is to promote a healthy lifestyle instead of obsessing over a certain number on the scale.

While it may be hard to get over the physical nature of your body, know that one aspect does not define who you are as a person. There is no such thing as the perfect face, the perfect complexion or the perfect height and weight.

It can help to limit media consumption – especially social media – as many body image triggers occur from looking at edited images of men and women.

In some cases, unfollowing certain celebrities, personalities and influencers on social media can help to avoid these triggers.

If you find yourself struggling with body image, contact a mental health provider in your area to discuss how you can change the way you view yourself. ***Your body is something that should be celebrated – not to be ashamed of!***

### **Resources**

National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA), <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/>

The Eating Disorder Foundation (EDF), <https://www.eatingdisorderfoundation.org/>

National Alliance for Eating Disorders, <https://www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com/>

Association for Size Diversity and Health, <https://asdah.org/>

Intuitive Eating, <https://www.intuitiveeating.org/>

Self-Compassion, Dr. Kristin Neff, <https://self-compassion.org/>

“*Stop Chasing Self-Esteem & Just Be Self-Compassionate,*” with Dr Kristin Neff, [https://youtu.be/MEyJ\\_H1U5SQ?si=E7CypIr2xVfvDO7e](https://youtu.be/MEyJ_H1U5SQ?si=E7CypIr2xVfvDO7e)

**MY BODY DESERVES  
KINDNESS AND  
RESPECT.**