



Alyssa Compeau

**Program Development Intern  
A Chance to Heal**



// **Wow, she really should not be wearing that shirt.** //

### **Friends Don't Let Friends Fat Talk**

"Do I look fat in these jeans?"

"Uh, I think I need to lose 10 pounds."

"Wow, she really should not be wearing that shirt."

Have you ever heard a friend make a comment like one of the above? Have you said something similar? As summer is in full swing and we attempt to beat the heat with beach trips and swimming, there is an increased likelihood of hearing these types of commentary. Such remarks that speak negatively about body weight or shape are what anthropologist Mimi Nichter named "fat talk." Although these comments are very common and accepted in today's society, they may actually be harmful to you and your friends.

In one study by Wertheim, Paxton, Schutz, & Muir (1997), adolescent girls, ages 14-16 years old, said they felt more self-conscious about their bodies after hearing fat talk comments from their friends. This tells us that what we say to our friends in conversation may unintentionally impact their self-perceptions. Additionally, the same girls reported that a friend's attempts at dieting have caused them to feel as though they too needed to diet and change their body shape. The alarming reality is that the everyday conversations we have with our friends surrounding body weight and shape may be very powerful and influential.

As fat talk may affect body dissatisfaction and dieting behaviors, it is important to surround ourselves with friends who do not talk negatively about their bodies. With fat talk so common and accepted, it undoubtedly will be difficult to stop these conversations altogether, but we have to begin somewhere. Start the trend within your social circle! Be the friend who stands up against fat talk comments. In doing so, you could help your entire group of friends reduce their participation in fat talk, and therefore lessen their likelihood of negative body thoughts and dangerous weight loss behaviors.



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For more information go to  
[www.healthyweightcommit.org](http://www.healthyweightcommit.org)

Dr. Carolyn Black-Becker, a leading researcher in the field of eating disorders, teamed up with the Tri Delta sorority to develop the Reflections Body Image Project. The Reflections team used the concept of fat talk to create Fat Talk Free Week (FTFW), wherein students pledge to stop fat talk among their friends. This pledge is paired with the message that we should focus on health, and not weight, and that beauty comes in many different shapes and sizes. Learning these principles has been shown to help in the prevention of eating disorders by reducing various risk factors, including body dissatisfaction and dieting behaviors. As such, it is essential to make the pledge with our friends, and to live by the FTFW motto, "Friends don't let friends fat talk"!

*Alyssa Compeau is a Program Development Intern for A Chance to Heal Foundation. A recent graduate of Dickinson College with a B.A. in Psychology, she conducted her senior honors thesis on the effects of fat talk among college women. Alyssa plans to continue her research on fat talk and disordered eating as a graduate student at Loyola University, beginning this fall.*