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For more information go to
www.healthyweightcommit.org

// I Promise Myself I Will... //

Obesity and Eating Disorders - The Common Element

As we all work to tackle the issues of obesity and eating disorders, it is important to recognize the critical link between these two epidemics. In her recent article, "The Blind Spot in the Drive for Childhood Obesity Prevention: Bringing Eating Disorders Prevention Into Focus as a Public Health Priority," S. Bryn Austin, ScD, says, "The evidence is mounting that obesity and eating disorders are linked in myriad ways." And one of the most significant links is body dissatisfaction.

As stated by Austin, "Simply put, youths who do not like their bodies seem to take worse care of them." And is it not true for all of us, that we take care of those things we love far better than those things we do not?

So how can we help our children really embrace, be satisfied with and take care of their bodies?

A Chance to Heal, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing eating disorders, disseminates an evidence-based eating disorder prevention program for youth called The Body Project, developed by Drs. Eric Stice and Katherine Presnell. One of the most powerful portions of the program occurs when we invite the students to participate in "Self Affirmation" exercises. Such an exercise is below.

Self Affirmations

Stand in front of a mirror and look at yourself and write down all your positive qualities. Please list at least 15. This includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and social qualities. For instance, you may like the shape of your arms, the strength of your legs, your long dark hair, the sound of your laugh, or the fact that you are a good friend. Please make sure to include at least some physical attributes on your list.



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In addition to this type of exercise, we encourage youth to make the following promises:

I Promise Myself I Will...

1. Care for my body in a loving way, always remembering I treat those things I love, well.
2. Maintain a balance in my nutrition and exercise, allowing my body to be healthy, strong and the right size and shape for me.
3. Listen to my body and respond to its needs.
4. Exercise for the 4 F's: Fun, Fitness, Friendship, and improved Function.
5. Treat myself as well as I treat my best friend.

Helping our youth understand there is no "perfect" body, and that the unique qualities of their own bodies should be celebrated, will go a long way in reversing the growing trends of body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and obesity.

¹ Austin, S. Bryn. The Blind Spot in the Drive for Childhood Obesity Prevention: Bringing Eating Disorders Prevention Into Focus as a Public Health Priority. *American Journal of Public Health*: April 14, 2011. Austin is Director of Fellowship Research Training in the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at Children's Hospital in Boston. She is Associate Professor in Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and Associate Professor in Society, Human Development, and Health at the Harvard School of Public Health.