

# MediaSmart

OPENING EYES

## Get Media Smart

Body Image and Advertising: a guide for parents and guardians



[mediasmart.uk.com](https://www.mediasmart.uk.com)

# An introduction to Media Smart

**Advertising can be a creative and inspiring world, where ideas come alive with drama, excitement and humour to keep us entertained and engaged. However, this commercial messaging touches most areas of young people's lives and so it is more important than ever that they understand exactly what is being suggested, promised and sold to them through the adverts they see every day.**

Media Smart is a not-for-profit company, funded by the UK advertising industry, which creates free educational materials for schools and youth organisations as well as teachers, parents and guardians. These help young people evaluate the advertising they come across in all aspects of their lives, using real case studies to help teach core media literacy skills.

This Get Media Smart guide for parents and guardians, which has been created with the support of the **Government Equalities Office**, is designed to provide an engaging introduction to body image and advertising and practical ideas to support your child in building their emotional resilience.

Best wishes

**Mark Lund**  
Chairman - Media Smart





## What is body image?



**A person's body image is the collection of thoughts and feelings they have about their body and the way it looks, and how they think it is perceived by others. Regardless of how an individual looks on the outside, they could have a negative or a positive body image of themselves.**

If someone has a positive body image, they are accepting of their body and are mostly content with their appearance. If a person has a negative body image, they can feel dissatisfied with their body and ashamed or embarrassed about how they appear to others.

### Why does body image matter?

Having a positive body image is an important part of a person's mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Unfortunately, many children are now suffering from a poor body image.

- **40–50% of 6–12 year olds** are dissatisfied with their appearance<sup>1</sup>
- **Over half of girls and a quarter of boys** think their peers have a body image problem<sup>2</sup>
- **47% 11–14 year olds** are opting out of everyday activities because they don't like the way they look<sup>3</sup>

If a child has a poor body image, it can contribute to under achievement at school, stop them from leading life to the full by limiting their participation in extra-curricular or social activities and, in extreme cases, lead to depression and self-harm.



### Does body image affect boys and girls?

Both boys and girls can experience negative body image. Girls in particular may feel significant pressure to match up to demanding and often unrealistic appearance ideals that can be present in the media they see around them. But boys are affected too. Boys may be slower to open up about any images or messages that affect their body image. They may even make light of the idea that their body image can be impacted in this way, and view it as a girls-only issue. For these reasons, it can be harder to initiate a conversation on this or related topics with a boy than a girl. Following the guidance in this document should provide practical ideas for supporting both sons and daughters in order to develop their media literacy skills and emotional resilience, boosting their body image.

<sup>1</sup> L. Smolak, 'Body Image development in childhood', 2011

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Appearance Research and Central YMCA, 2011

<sup>3</sup> Girlguiding, Girls' Attitudes Survey, 2013



## Developing advertising literacy: how can I help?



**Parents and guardians can play a key role in supporting young people to develop positive body image and build their emotional resilience when exposed to advertising and media. Here are some ideas to support you with this.**

### Raise awareness

Get talking about advertising! Help your child to recognise all the different types of advertising and media that they see every day. Consider the fact that they see adverts on television, in magazines, on billboards and buses, on computers and any device that can access the Internet such as their phones and tablets. You can download Media Smart's Advertising and Social Media guide for parents at: [mediasmart.uk.com/parents-guardians](http://mediasmart.uk.com/parents-guardians)

- ▶ **Play 'spot the advert' when you are out and about and ask your child how many they think they see in a day.**

### Encourage your child to look closely at the advertising they see

Help your child understand that advertising can have many different purposes, for example to sell a product, provide information, or influence our behaviour (e.g. to be healthier or support a charity).

Advertisers make careful choices about how people look in their adverts to help create a particular emotional response. They might want to make us laugh, feel sadness or empathy for the people we see, relate to them or feel that we might be a bit happier if our lives were a little more like the ones we are watching.

- ▶ **Sit with your child when they are watching adverts and ask them questions to encourage discussion:**

- What kind of adverts do you like? Which do you dislike?

- What is the purpose of these adverts?
  - What do you notice about the different people featured in adverts?
  - Why do you think the advertisers have chosen to feature these people?
  - Adverts have to follow rules so cannot mislead us, but they do sometimes use techniques to change how things look and encourage us to make certain decisions. What different techniques can you identify?
- ▶ **Share Media Smart's Body Image and Advertising film with your child. This features young people discussing body image and advertising. Use this as a starting point for discussion. Have a conversation with your child about the different views expressed. You can view the film at: [mediasmart.uk.com/resources/teaching-resources/body-image](http://mediasmart.uk.com/resources/teaching-resources/body-image)**

# Q

## Body image: how can I help?

# A

Young people live in a world saturated with media messaging, and will have already absorbed many messages about our culture's definition of beauty or 'appearance'. Although you might worry about the many influences and pressures on your child, you are still the most important influence on your child's body image. There are a number of things you can do to support your child in developing their emotional resilience (that is, a strong sense of their own worth and identity) which in turn will better equip them to develop positive self-esteem and a healthy body image.

<sup>4</sup> Dr P. Eckler, 'Social media pictures may lead to negative body images', University of Strathclyde, 2014; Professor Fenton, 'How healthy behaviour supports children's well-being', Public Health England, 2013; 'Children, Teens, Media and Body Image', Common Sense Media, 2015



### TALK POSITIVELY ABOUT THEIR BODY AND WHAT IT CAN DO RATHER THAN HOW IT LOOKS

It is never too early to give messages to your children about loving and appreciating their bodies, e.g. **"Nobody's looks are perfect, let's focus on what you like about yourself"**.



### BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

Children are very aware of their parents' attitudes and behaviours. For instance, avoid comparing yourself to images you see in magazines. Instead, show them that you are able to identify and evaluate the messages within adverts, especially those that relate to appearance. Try to refrain from criticising your own or others' bodies and appearance.



### RECOGNISE YOUR CHILD'S QUALITIES AND SKILLS WHEN YOU PRAISE THEM

Emphasise what you appreciate about their character and skills rather than focusing on their appearance, e.g. **"You always make me laugh, I love your sense of humour!"** or **"You're a great listener for your friend – she obviously values your support"**.



### MANAGE THEIR SCREEN TIME

Research has shown that when children spend a lot of time in front of screens, such as on social media or playing computer games, it can have a negative impact on their body image and self-esteem.<sup>4</sup> Try to ensure that there are screen-free times during the day.



### KEEP COMMUNICATION OPEN

Provide plenty of opportunities to have conversations with your child where they feel they can open up about their feelings. Listen to their concerns and worries. Be mindful not to jump in to offer advice but recognise what they have said and help them come up with their own solutions, e.g. **"You sound upset, I wonder what you could do that might help"**.

## Want to find out more? Then take a look at:

### Reading materials

While primarily aimed at schools, **Body Image in the Primary School** by **Nicky Hutchinson and Chris Calland** contains tips for parents.

ISBN: 9780415561914

The following body image children's books are written for primary aged children.

**All Kinds of Bodies** by **Emma Brownjohn**

ISBN: 9781857075601

**All Kinds of People** by **Emma Damon**

ISBN: 9781857070675

**Your Body Is Beautiful** by **Sigrun Danielsdottir**

ISBN: 9781848192218

**Media Smart** produces a range of materials designed to support young people in developing their media literacy. Our Advertising and Social Media guide for parents (mentioned previously) is designed to help you improve your child's understanding of social media.

Link: [mediasmart.uk.com/parents-guardians](https://mediasmart.uk.com/parents-guardians)

**Credos**, the Advertising Association's think-tank, has recently produced a new research piece on how advertising affects boys.

Link: [adassoc.org.uk/news/about-credos/](https://adassoc.org.uk/news/about-credos/)

**Dove Self-Esteem Project** supports young people in developing self-esteem and body confidence. They have lots of advice for parents, especially parents of daughters.

Link: [selfesteem.dove.co.uk/Articles/Written/Mums-and-Dads.aspx](https://selfesteem.dove.co.uk/Articles/Written/Mums-and-Dads.aspx)



# With thanks from Media Smart

**Thank you so much for taking the time to read our Body Image and Advertising guide, we hope you have found it both interesting and useful. If you have enjoyed it, why not share it with your friends and contacts?**

This parent guide is part of Media Smart's range of free educational resources and has an accompanying Body Image and Advertising classroom resource. Please do let your child's teacher know about this opportunity - all they need to do is visit [mediasmart.uk.com](http://mediasmart.uk.com) for full information and to register.

For the latest news, follow us on our own social media accounts:

[twitter.com/mediasmartuk](https://twitter.com/mediasmartuk)

[facebook.com/ukmediasmart](https://facebook.com/ukmediasmart)

Best wishes  
**Team Media Smart**



# Acknowledgements

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### The Expert Panel

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**Reg Bailey CBE** Independent reviewer of the commercialisation & sexualisation of childhood

**Alison Preston** Head of Media Literacy Research at Ofcom

**Gwyn Owens** Head of the Creative Economy at DCMS

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