



5 KEY STEPS TO BEING A BODY-POSITIVE PARENT

Are you ready to start body-positive parenting today?



Hi, we're Zoë Bisbing, LCSW and Leslie Bloch, LCSW-R - both NYC-based, adolescent eating disorder psychotherapists and mothers of two. We help parents use their family environment to promote self esteem and positive body image in their children.

We do this through the [Full Bloom Project](#), where we offer a weekly podcast, an A to Z guide, and online courses to help parents and health providers learn how to put body-positive parenting into practice. These key steps to body-positive parenting will help you identify 5 of the simplest and most essential ways to start shifting your family environment today.

Parents are bombarded with constantly changing messages about what's healthy for kids, not to mention images of what bodies should look like that are unrealistic for the majority of people to achieve. You likely want to help your kiddos accept and embrace their unique body, but it's challenging to know how to start - particularly if your child doesn't fit the mold of the "perfect body" ideal or you struggle with your own body image issues. But when children [in elementary school](#) are already concerned about being "fat" and feel better if they're dieting, it's essential that we know how to help our kids avoid the cultural trap of growing up obsessing over and hating their bodies.

We're here to talk you through the most important steps that all parents can take to raise children who embrace body-positivity, eat in tune with their body's signals, move joyfully, and have a sense of identity and self worth outside of their body size.

Warmly,
Zoë and Leslie

1. Create a family culture where foods don't have moral value, and nothing is forbidden.

When you label foods as either “good” or “bad, or “healthy” versus “junk,” it can lead to complicated emotions like stress, fear, and anxiety around eating experiences for your kids. And research shows that forbidding foods from the home environment actually **increases** children's preference for those foods, making them more likely to overeat when they do have access to them.

On top of that, children whose parents restrict food or use food as a reward are also **more likely** to eat to cope with negative emotions (instead of eating in accordance with internal cues of hunger and fullness).

Instead of making “bad” foods off-limits, try stocking your kitchen with a range of foods, from broccoli to ice cream, so that they're equally available, convenient, and accessible for your kids to choose from. This can be a big and scary shift - and it requires a lot of trust - if you're used to keeping certain foods out of the house. But ultimately the research shows that this is a key step to helping kids develop a balanced, neutral relationship to all foods.

2. Help your children tune in to their own internal signals of hunger, fullness, and satisfaction.

Children are born intuitive eaters, meaning they naturally trust their body's wisdom and eat according to its needs - without guilt, rules, or restriction. Preserving this trust and ability to self-regulate is an invaluable step you can take to protect your child's health and wellbeing. Intuitive eating approaches have been found to **positively impact** eating habits, body image, self esteem, psychological health, and quality of life.

When you teach your child to follow their internal hunger and satiety cues, they will be **naturally able** to adjust their food intake in response to need - meaning you won't have to worry about setting and enforcing rules around how much they eat.

For younger kids, try creating a “**hunger meter**” together, where they can name and describe their levels of hunger and the sensations that accompany them. Talk about the hunger meter around meal and snack times so kids get practice recognizing and tuning into their body's signals, wants, and needs when making eating choices.

3. Get active together as a family, and model finding joy and a sense of fun in movement.

Getting active is one of the best ways to feel great about yourself and your body, no matter what size it is. Physical activity has a multitude of benefits for physical health, mental health, and self esteem. But the positive impact of exercise on self esteem actually **decreases** when you exercise only as a means to lose weight or change your appearance. For both your kids and yourself, avoid framing movement as a way to control your appearance or body. Instead, try focusing on other motivations for exercise, like feeling good, building strength, accomplishing goals, having fun, and connecting with others.

A great place to start is by helping your child find ways of getting active that they really enjoy (and challenge yourself to do the same!). Moving as a family is especially powerful. And remember that it doesn't need to be an intense workout class to have an impact - playing together, dancing, taking walks, biking, ice skating, and splashing in the pool are all great ways to move as a family.

4. Create family values of size acceptance and body diversity rather than buying into appearance, shape, and weight ideals.

As a parent, you play a key role in communicating your family's values and priorities about what is important in life. Your kids are listening and soaking up like a sponge the way you speak about bodies - whether it's in response to a person on a TV show, your child, or yourself. Try modeling acceptance and using sensitive language about ALL bodies, and that includes your own!

On top of that, find opportunities to point out and challenge unrealistic depictions of bodies and examples of weight-shaming. **Just a few minutes** of exposure to unrealistic images of bodies has been found to increase depression and shame, and reduce self esteem. In those moments, try encouraging your child to think critically about cultural representations of bodies that may make them feel bad. Try asking your kids: who is benefiting or making money when people feel bad about their appearance?

5. Don't go at it alone - and seek out more support if you need it.

Practicing body-positive parenting doesn't come easily for most - and that's because it goes against so much of what we're taught by our culture, which tells us to idolize thinness and strive for weight loss as a measure of health. It can be really challenging to resist judging yourself or others based on body shape, to break free of the food rules you were raised with, and to examine your own beliefs about the connection between weight and health.

We all live in [diet culture](#), surrounded by toxic messaging that body-positive parenting tries to resist. It helps to start with yourself (and if you're reading this, you've probably already begun!) and get the support and resources you need to adopt a body-positive stance. And when you share and communicate about what you've learned with other important people in your child's life - like other caregivers, grandparents, pediatricians, teachers, and coaches - you can build community, get support, and build a united front of body-positivity to present to your child. The impact on your family will be all the more powerful.



These 5 suggestions can help you make significant changes when it comes to supporting positive body image and self esteem in your children. But, without a more detailed understanding of the core principles of body-positive parenting, it can be hard to find your own blind spots and work through a true paradigm shift in how your family approaches body image, intuitive eating, weight, and health.

If you'd like to use these hacks to their full potential, consider checking out our [mini-course](#), where we take you through an in-depth introduction to the fundamentals of body-positive parenting. We dive deep into the three concepts we think are essential for you to understand - diet culture, weight stigma, and the thin ideal - so you'll know what you're up against and how to take action to help your children fully bloom.

We'll give you the same presentation we give when we consult and speak with groups to help you jumpstart your body-positive parenting journey today. After the mini-course, you'll have confidence in strategies supported by research to help your children break free from insecurity, body shame, and troubled relationships with food, and have clear next steps for how to promote true wellbeing for every member of your family.

[Click here to get the mini-course now.](#)