



“Ancestry”

“[In the process of eating disorder recovery] what I came to appreciate was the actual shape and size of my own body, which I then realized came from my mother’s incredible lineage... I was starting to see the beauty and power that comes when we can appreciate who we come from.”

- Connie Sobczak, Full Bloom Podcast

Body image and self-esteem may feel like individual experiences or very personal journeys. Our kids (and everyone living in diet culture) hear messages daily that the size and shape of their bodies are a reflection of their personal worth. We are also told that we as individuals have the ability to control the size and shape of our bodies, if we just eat following a certain plan, or exercise in a certain way. But research tells us the truth is far from that simple – developmental history, age, and genetics all impact body weight and size – and these are factors we have no control over.

What does that mean in practice? It means that our children’s bodies often end up looking like those of their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and relatives from generations past. It also means we can actually use this fact to help our children build confidence and self esteem. In episode #1 of our podcast, Connie Sobczak, co-founder of [The Body Positive](#), suggests that everyone can benefit from thinking about their body image beyond the individual here-and-now, and looking at a bigger picture instead. She reminds us that our bodies reflect our lineage, the lives and journeys and experiences of our ancestors, and are a physical representation of how our relatives provided for us to be here today.

As a body-positive parenting practice, we want to help our children feel proud and connected to where they come from. We hope to talk to them regularly about their relatives and ancestors, point out their similarities, and see, as Connie puts it, “the beauty and power that comes when we can appreciate who we come from.”

When children have a sense of how their bodies are connected to their family members and ancestors, it creates a sense of pride, appreciation, and also responsibility. Our appearance can connect us to important people in our lives, and to the people reaching back in history whose existence gave us life. When we ask our children to think of their bodies as gifts from ancestors, they have greater opportunity to build strong and healthy self-esteem, and are more likely to value body kindness and respect.

Psychologist Leon Festinger first proposed a theory of cognitive dissonance centered on how people try to reach internal consistency. Inconsistent or conflicting beliefs lead to disharmony, which people strive to avoid. Cognitive dissonance can occur in many areas of life, but it’s particularly evident in situations where an individual’s behavior conflicts with beliefs that are integral to his or her self-identity.



For example, consider a situation where an adolescent who places value on being respectful of their family heritage hears peers disparaging their own bodies. It's important for the teen to fit in with their friends, but at the same time, this teen has a strong sense of why their body is shaped the way it is, and is able to connect this to their unique ancestry (because they have body-positive parents!)

When there are conflicts between cognitions (thoughts, beliefs, opinions), people will take steps to reduce the dissonance and feelings of discomfort. Talking with your kids about ancestry can help create cognitive dissonance with the messages they receive from diet culture about the value of their bodies.

By The Full Bloom Project
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