



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS & YOUTH

MEDIA LITERACY

The media: how does it influence us?

How do I know if advertising and media are influencing how I see myself?

- Seeing an ad makes you feel dissatisfied or depressed about your body and weight.
- Your role models for beauty are fashion models and celebrities.
- You read and believe articles or commercials that tell you the perfect body is just a diet away.

Do you sometimes look in the mirror and not like what you see? You aren't alone. We all have days when we feel awkward or uncomfortable in our bodies.

We feel the pressure to measure up to the way a model looks in a magazine, or how an actor or actress looks on a TV show. Through the internet and social media, we are exposed to these unrealistic beauty standards in our everyday life.

The models and celebrities we see in these images seem so happy, rich, and popular. It's an image of beauty and lifestyle that most of us can only dream about. When we are confronted with these ideals of attractiveness that we can't achieve, it can feel isolating. It can change the perception we have about how our own bodies look.

It's not just girls and women who are influenced by these images. As men's magazines become more popular, there is increasing pressure on boys and men to look like the images of well-built guys.

The powerful effect of media images on self-esteem and body image can lead to disordered eating.

But we can learn to understand that these images—whether they come from magazines or Facebook—don't tell the whole story. This is called "media literacy."

MEDIA LITERACY



Did you know?

AS CONSUMERS, WE CAN REJECT THESE ARTIFICIAL IMAGES OF BEAUTY.

We can think critically about how the images we see make us feel dissatisfied with our bodies and doubt our own self-worth. And we can decide to avoid or pay less attention to media that makes us feel anxious about our bodies. These steps can prevent us from holding up our bodies to unhealthy comparisons or treating our bodies as objects, instead of as an essential part of ourselves.

If we refuse to accept damaging, unattainable images of “the ideal body,” we will help to create new, more realistic standards of who we are and how we look. Changing these standards can contribute to making our lives healthier.

What can I do?

- 1 Be aware of how the bodies presented in ads are distorted or manipulated—photographed with special lighting and then retouched and enhanced using computer software.
- 2 Question why these companies and their advertisers create false standards of beauty. Make the money you spend reflect the person you are, not the person you’re told you should be.
- 3 Be a role model to yourself and others. Develop your own style and celebrate who you are. Break free from the restrictive ways media and advertising say we should look.
- 4 Avoid media that makes you feel anxious about yourself or your body.
- 5 Become a critical consumer of media. Protest the negative images and messages you see by writing letters to advertisers, television stations, and movie studios.
- 6 Encourage media and advertising to showcase bodies of all sizes and backgrounds.
- 7 Remember that the media and beauty industries want to make money, not to help you to reach your full potential. Only you can decide what the “best you” looks like.

Media literacy means understanding the images that we are presented with have often been changed with computer software to make the models look “perfect.”

For a great example of this, check out the [Dove Evolution of Beauty video](#) (on YouTube), which shows a model from beginning makeup to finished “product.”

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