

# Help Your Kids Avoid Looksism

Looksism is the act of judging a person based on their physical appearance. It is a prejudice similar to racism.

Children and teens often judge others by the clothes they wear or how they look. They see celebrities with slim bodies, beautiful clothes and pretty features on TV and in magazines. To kids, celebrities are attractive.

A study of 6 year-old children showed a prejudice against overweight kids. The children were shown a silhouette of a fat child. Many labeled the child in the picture as lazy, stupid, dirty and slow.

Children are becoming over-concerned about their physical appearance. One study of third to sixth grade girls showed that:

- Almost 50% of normal weight girls wanted to be thinner.
- Thirty-three percent have used a diet to lose weight.
- Seventy-eight percent are afraid of getting fat.

In another study:

- 56% of 12 to 13 year old girls like the way they look.
- 33% of 14 to 17 year old girls think they are overweight.
- 60% of 14 to 17 year old girls are trying to lose weight.

These statistics should concern parents.

Parents and family give children ideas of

what it means to be attractive. You shape their value system. Let your child know that attractive people are:

- Kind and respectful to others.
- Physically healthy. They eat healthy food and exercise regularly.
- Have special interests like reading books, playing sports, or pursuing art and music.
- Take an interest in what people do and think.

Your daily words and actions must teach your child what it means to be attractive.

- Praise your child for her choice of clothes, not how pretty she looks.
- Encourage your child to be healthy, not thin.
- Talk about what celebrities do and think - not how they look. For example, "I like her comments on the Iraq war. She has really researched the topic well."
- Do not express your desire to be thinner or more beautiful.

First, you must value and respect physical diversity among your family and friends. Then, together work to overcome the prejudice of looksism.

*Brought to you by Parent Help Line at HSHS St. John's Children's Hospital  
to help keep kids safe, healthy and happy.*



**Call the Parent Help Line. Help is just a phone call away.**

1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week

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