self-esteem discussion guide

For mothers
of girls aged 11-16

Dove
self-esteem
project

Helps girls build body confidence

"No young person should leave school feeling that they can't participate fully in life because of the way that they think they look"

Dr. Nancy Etcoff, Director, Program in Aesthetics and Well Being, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard

Dove self-esteem project

Our social mission:

To encourage all women and girls to develop a positive relationship with beauty, helping to raise their self-esteem, and thereby enabling them to realise their full potential.

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Why has this resource been produced?

Today there is more pressure than ever on young girls and boys to be physically perfect. We see this reflected in the news all around us. Let's look at some worrying facts:

- Over 60% of girls avoid certain activities because they feel bad about their looks.

  For example:
  - 19% won't try out for a team or club
  - 23% won't go to the beach or pool
  - 13% won't give an opinion
  - 15% won't go to school

  ('The Real Truth About Beauty – Revisited', Dove Global study, 2010)

- 92% of girls say they want to change at least one aspect of their physical appearance, with body weight ranking the highest *('Beyond stereotypes', Dove Global study, 2005)*

- Looking at magazines for just 60 minutes lowers the self-esteem of over 80% of girls *(Dr. Raj Persaud, Consultant Psychiatrist, Maudsley Hospital)*

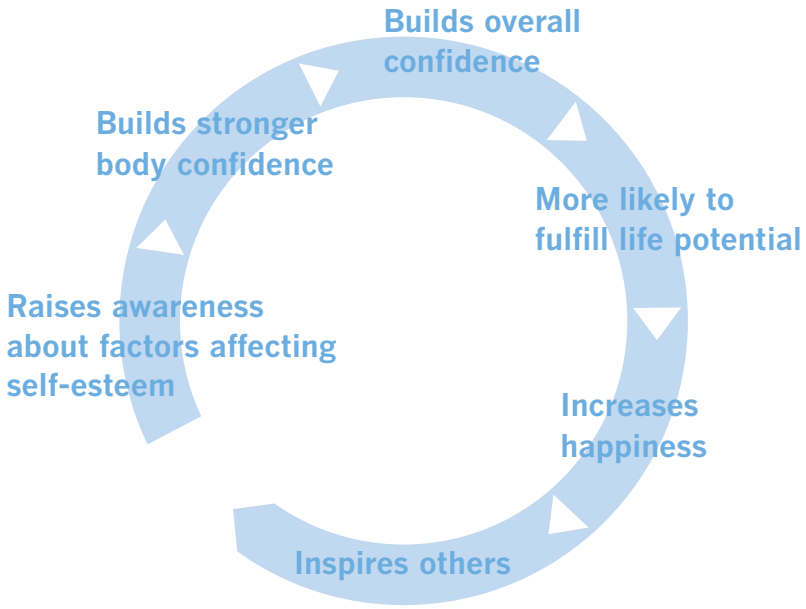
- The body fat of models and actresses portrayed in the media is at least 50% less than that of healthy women *(British Medical Association, 2000)*

- 63% of girls would rather be a men's magazine model than a doctor, teacher or nurse *(TheLab, 1000 girls aged 15-19)*

Spurred by facts like these, the Dove Self-Esteem Project campaign aims to prevent the damage caused when young people develop low self-esteem from hang-ups about their looks. Clearly mothers have an important part to play too as they are in a very influential position to shape how narrowly or widely their daughters define 'beauty'.

- Over 50% of 11-15 year old girls say that their mother helps them the most when they have a problem. *(The Ten Emerging Truths: New Directions for Girls 11-17, 2002)*

How does this resource work?



What do we mean by 'happiness'?

'Everyone wants to be happy. But what is it exactly and how do we get it? Well, that depends on the individual. Some people create an image of a specific set of external circumstances that they need to achieve in order to reach happiness, saying things like 'I'll be happy when I lose 5lbs/2kgs, get a new job, have a new pair of shoes.' Unfortunately, these 'ideas' of happiness are often influenced by the person's surroundings, their family, society, friends, the media – outside influences.

Real happiness comes when you gain a confident sense of yourself. You are not blocked by negative introspection, you are able to express your own thoughts and opinions, and most importantly, you can fully appreciate the powerful affects that come from having body confidence.

This resource aims to support parents and mentors (like you) in your conversations with your daughters around body confidence and self-esteem. Your input is vital. Your daughter values you and looks to you to help work through her confusion and questions.

Dear moms

Here are some questions around body confidence that we get asked a lot, so we thought it might be a good idea to put some answers together for you.

It's easy to worry about our daughters. We want to protect them and we can feel concerned when they get upset about their bodies. Mothers are a big influence on daughters and we can affect them positively. Children are incredible mimics. It is how they learn to fit in. They watch us and copy us and so the more we can accept our own bodies, the more natural it will feel to them to accept theirs.

I'm not saying it is easy to do. We know how important beauty and being a particular size has become and how it can be a struggle for many of us.

Keeping our own battles with weight and low body confidence away from our daughters is important. No one wants them to grow up thinking that to be female means to constantly worry about one's body.

Indeed, we all want the best for our daughters – for them to grow up having positive relationships with beauty so that they can fulfill their lives' potential.

Susie Orbach

Dr. Susie Orbach,

Mother, psychoanalyst, body activist and author of numerous books on the body and emotional literacy including 'Bodies' and 'On Eating'

1. Passing on body confidence

Q "Sometimes I have days when I don't feel great about my body. I'm fairly happy most of the time, but I do worry that my daughter could pick up on some of the negative feelings I have and that it would make her worry about herself more. How can I stop that happening?"

We all have bad hair and bad body days so let's focus on what you can do to help yourself and your daughter and what things you could stop doing in front of her (and hopefully stop altogether!)

A

Things to stop doing in her ear-shot:

- **Don't look in the mirror and sigh about how lumpy or awful you feel**
- **Don't complain about your floppy bits**
- **Don't say "I shouldn't be eating this because I don't want to put on weight"**

How to create better feelings about your own body

- Do look at pictures of yourself from a few years ago that you like. If you were dissatisfied with your body at the time and realize now that you looked just fine and wish you had that body today, do try to accept and enjoy your body as it is, at this stage. (It would be awful to look back a few years from now at pictures of you today and have those same regretful feelings.)

- Do move your body. Put on music and dance around or go for a walk. Feeling how alive your body is from the inside is a good antidote to the criticisms foisted on it from the outside.

- Do remind yourself that the images in magazines are often digitally touched up, stretched and lit in extraordinary ways rather than being pictures of real women.

- Do remember yours is a body that has lived, worked, given birth, brought up a child and run a household. Bodies change as we age and it is a fiction that they could ever look like the 'perfected' images in the media.

How to help your daughter create positive feelings about her own body

- Help her enjoy the changes her body is going through. If she hasn't started to develop yet, anticipate her body changes with pleasure in such phrases as "I wonder whether you are going to have my breasts, or Grandma Flo's or Aunt Sophie's! We just don't know. It'll be exciting to see..."

- If she already has developed, you can support her with "Your body is just so lovely now you are turning into a young woman. Enjoy it."

These kinds of sentences can sound funny to our ears the first time round. But they convey good feelings to our daughters and give them a positive sense of their own physical changes.

2. Opening up the conversation

Q "I really want to talk freely and honestly with my daughter, but sometimes it can be difficult to talk to her about her self-esteem. How do I start talking to her about it?"

A Self-esteem doesn't mean feeling good about yourself all of the time. People who have strong self-esteem are able to recognize and understand their feelings; to make sense of what can hurt them and to be aware of what can make them feel confident.

Talking about feelings and actions and being very specific in one's praise (or criticism) can be really helpful in building self-esteem. A child doesn't really know what to do with blanket praise but a specific line like:

"I noticed how kind you were even though you really didn't want to look after little Johnny…"

…identifies a specific behaviour and shows your daughter you have understood her and respect what she has done. If she is struggling with homework and always puts it off but manages to get down to half of it, a sentence like:

"You can feel proud of yourself for getting on with that. Well done."

…helps her feel positively reinforced. The same theory works when she's cleaning up her room – notice the effort and show her she can feel good about it.

If it comes to praising clothes or an art or writing project, try and pick out something you particularly like such as:

"The way you put your clothes together is really original"

"The way you told that story made me laugh so much. You have such a fresh style"

"The way you drew the house makes it so inviting"

Sentences such as these will give her something real about herself to grab on to. She will probably come back with "Really, Mom? I'm not sure" and that gives you a chance to extend what you were saying and to talk about the things you've seen that she can feel proud about.

Developing her feelings of self-esteem also involves her understanding how to manage her emotions: the painful ones as well as the pleasing ones. If she shows you she is sad, try a supportive "Oh that really is sad" rather than comforting her out of what she is feeling. If she can experience the feeling of sadness and accept it, then she will feel that ache for a bit but it will then pass and she will be ready to feel something else.

If she senses that it isn't really all right to feel sad, that it affects you badly or worries you, then she will cut off that feeling and be a bit confused. The sad feeling may then return in a different form and she may not know how to deal with this. If she feels it is OK to be sad,

then she will probably stay in a conversation with you and you can go on to say something like "It's so disappointing when x happens..."

Having her feelings recognized and given the right name is very comforting. It means she does not have to be ashamed of them, whatever they are. It is this ease with accepting one's feelings that creates and nourishes self-esteem.

3. Seeing the fullness of beauty

Q "My daughter's self-esteem relies on her body confidence a lot. She's really beautiful to me, and I know she's at least as attractive as her friends, but she doesn't always see that. How do I get her to appreciate how important the other things about her are?"

A Try greeting your daughter and her friends with a sentence that goes something like "Wow, you three girls are all such beauties."
When you are alone with her, you can talk about how lovely she and her friends are and how appealing their different physicality is:

"Isn't that Gemma's height magnificent? It's so lovely to see you and her together, such a perfectly formed little one and Gemma with her magnificent height... and Cassie's smile is just so open and inviting isn't it?"

If she responds by saying "You're wrong, Mom, I feel ugly", you could walk her to the mirror and show her how you see her. This could open up a conversation about how you see things for girls her age and how awful it is for them to have so much pressure on them to look just one way rather than celebrate their variety. You can also stress again the lovely things about her body.
You could also tell her the ways in which you value her and the things about her you're proud of. Be specific. She might say that those things don't count, and that all she cares about is her looks, but she will also be listening and it can penetrate. Make it a habit to talk about people's attributes apart from their looks.

You can reinforce values that lead to body confidence.

4. Pressure from friends

Q "My daughter's friends have a huge impact on her self-image. I worry that they can encourage each other to diet and that they are generally too obsessed with trying to look like celebrities they see in magazines.
Some of them are talking about plastic surgery. How can I encourage her to be comfortable with herself and not feel like she has to always follow what her friends do?"

A One strategy is to talk to them together and get involved in a conversation about magazines and celebrities and how those magazines find clever ways to sell them things. Look at the pictures with them and ask them what they like about the pictures. Don't try to judge them for enjoying glamour. It can be fun. Try to find a way to tell them it isn't real life, just a part of life. Those glamorous, sexy images take hours to create.

You might want to talk with them about the magazines that photograph celebrities and models as they are in normal life. Our fascination with these images is because we usually see the celebrities so perfected. The girls need to know that the celebrities they so crave to be like and admire, often look less gorgeous than your daughter and her friends.

Fashions in body shape and features change. When you grew up, perhaps big breasts or height weren't so prized. Now they are and some girls are getting breasts implants as gifts even before their bodies have fully developed. This is obviously alarming and it is important to find a way that you can talk with your girls without embarrassing them for wanting to change their bodies.

Let them know how fashions for body features are changeable yet how cosmetic surgery is permanent. It is hard for our girls to know that they will feel differently a few years from now but if you remind them of how ghastly they think last year's fashions are, or an old hairstyle, or how you looked at their age, these kinds of ideas will start to blow away the fantasy of instant transformation.

You can also tell your daughter some of the facts about dieting. For instance, if you diet you are 12 times more likely to binge. Whereas if you allow yourself a range of foods when you are hungry, you are likely to have a more stable weight. Dieting usually provokes weight or eating problems rather than solving them. And diets don't work anyway. If they did you would only have to do them once.

The present rate of 'failure' on a diet is 95%. That means even if you lose a little weight, it doesn't stay off through dieting. Dieting messes up your eating and it is a very unhealthy habit to get in to. Eating well and regularly is a great mood enhancer.

5. Effects of physical changes

Q "My daughter has suddenly stopped wanting to do things she used to enjoy, such as going to dance classes with her friends or going swimming, because she feels too self-conscious and ashamed of her body. She is twelve and it doesn't feel right. What can I do? "

A **Adolescence is a really turbulent time in which unpredictable physical changes accompany the emotional confusion and identity questions that come with becoming a young adult. She wants to, and is expected to, handle more responsibilities and yet she can often feel as though she is still a little girl. In this psychologically stormy time, taking control (or trying to) of activities like swimming that were previously decided for by Mom, may feel like a way of stepping up to her new role.**

At the same time, it may be a way to control confusing emotional an identity concerns so a two-pronged approach can help.

Talk about the huge body changes that occur over these years and how you never knew whether you were going to be gangly or an ugly duckling when you were her age. This will help her feel less isolated.

Acknowledge how hard it can be when your body starts sprouting in different directions. Keeping up with dancing and swimming will give her some continuity.

Standing firm and encouraging her to continue with activities she used to love or finding new ways to express herself through her body (e.g. trying more 'grown up' things like yoga, pilates or tennis) can help smooth her into young womanhood.

Try talking to her about what it is that she specifically dislikes, whether it is body hair, spots, or the need to learn how to use tampons or find a hairstyle that works with who she is at this age, will provide moments of intimacy and the chance to chat about the other things that girls of her age worry about.

These might be:

- **Boys**
- **How girls can be mean to one another**
- **Which crowd she is in**
- **How gossipy her friends are**
- **How boys and men look at her**

Talking in this way will help shift the emphasis away from her body and let her feel that these passionately felt difficulties and confusions in her life can be talked about with you. As her Mom you can listen and help her understand that her concerns are normal. Keep the door open to communicate as she shifts and changes.

6. Eating healthily

Q "My daughter wants to go from one 'diet' to another, and sometimes I struggle to get her to eat enough. I know this could have a long-term impact on her life, but I can't seem to get her to accept the idea of eating healthily."

A One way troubles about the body play out is through food. Most girls now are on a constant sort of diet, believing that they should be restricting their eating in one way or another.

Many girls have become so frightened of food that they treat it is an enemy they have to stave off. Not surprisingly, food then takes on almost magical qualities with particular foods being magnetic. It is not unusual for girls to veer between dieting or not eating and then suddenly getting caught up in bingeing because, having restricted certain foods, their appetites rebel and bite back.

If your daughter is doing this it is worth telling her that there is nothing so tempting as a food that is off limits. Making all foods allowable and moving away from the idea of good foods and bad foods makes it easier to make wise choices. It really is worrying when girls start cutting back drastically and when you see that their eating or not eating has little to do with hunger and fullness and everything to do with invented rules they read about in magazines or exchange with their friends.

Being matter-of-fact about eating yourself is an important model for your daughter. Letting her hear you reflect on your own satisfaction, or your own capacity to make choices, will go some way to making food a normal, rather than

"That was just right"

"I am ravenous, great"

"Shame, I just made this delicious dinner and I'm not that hungry"

"My eyes would love to have some more of X but I know my tummy will not be happy"

The sanest way for our daughters and ourselves to eat is:

- To respond to our hunger and eat when we are hungry
- To stop when we are full

This isn't the easiest thing to do because we can lose the connection between the two. Often we eat when we aren't hungry. The trouble with that is if you eat when you aren't hungry there is no signal indicating you are about to be full so it can be hard to stop. It is important to model eating behaviour that restores the idea of appetite and fullness rather than dieting and bingeing.

Talking to our daughters from early on about how eating is a response to hunger, just like peeing is a response to a full bladder, can be helpful. They know that peeing is a natural process which they respond to rather than think and strategize about. So looking at food in the same way can let you start a conversation about how eating when you are hungry, and eating the foods that allow you to feel when you are full, will satisfy you.

It will also help food get digested more efficiently because that's how our bodies are designed. Our metabolism works most effectively if we eat when we are hungry. Your daughters might not realise that our bodies are designed to cope with occasional famine and that if we eat too little continually (through dieting) we don't end up losing weight so much as we end up slowing down our metabolism because our body thinks it is in a famine state and conserves the food super-efficiently.

If you can model eating behaviour that restores the idea of appetite and fullness, rather than dieting and bingeing, your daughter will have something more sustainable to draw on.

If you have or have had eating difficulties yourself then these tips can help you balance your own eating:

- **Pay attention to your own hunger signals**
- **Eat exactly what is right for you**
- **Taste every mouthful and stop when you are full**
- **Don't over or under fill your plate**

7. Enjoying just being a girl

Q "I'm concerned that my daughter is getting worried about her body when she should still be enjoying her childhood, and I don't know what I can do."

A Many mothers feel quite alarmed that body troubles are affecting their daughters at earlier and earlier ages.

It's hard because fashion, style and music are reaching girls earlier and creating concern about body shape and size. Try not to be too alarmed. This is now part of growing up, but make sure to offer your daughter other experiences in which she can feel good about herself and enjoy herself.

Don't avoid talking about her body and how adorable it is. Remind her of all the things she can do with it like sports or dancing. You can show your delight in her body and the fact that she still lets you cuddle her.

Most of all, don't drop casual negative comments about your own body into your conversations. In fact, see if you can go one step further and say positive things about your body and what it can do and the ways in which it makes you feel happy. If you go to the gym or do sports, pass on remark about how much energy it gives you.

8. Celebrity culture

Q "The way my daughter thinks about herself is really influenced by the images of perfection she sees in the media and the celebrities she looks up to. How do I help her keep a healthy attitude?"

A It often feels as though all our best efforts towards our daughters are being undermined by our celebrity culture.

Try laughing with her about how amazing it is that so many people's energy – stylists, hairdressers, make-up artists, photographers, lighting technicians, dress-makers and fashion designers – goes into creating that look and how maintaining the look is a full time job.

Get her to laugh with you about what fashions are considered essential this season and how we now all hate what was so in last year. This might help her see style as fun rather than essential to well-being. There is an excellent resource for young teenagers called the Dove Self-Esteem Workshop Guide for Teachers which can be downloaded from www.dove.com. This resource shows young people how images in magazines are constructed and gives them tools to boost their self-esteem.

It might be helpful to talk about how we seem to like just one bodytype and how you would love to see a celebrity who has a really different bodytype and who is not 100% perfect. Another kind of thing you can talk about is what kind of lives she imagines those 'perfected' people live.

You could also say how sad it is that people are encouraged to change their uniqueness through plastic surgery. Instead of making people feel more confident it can often make someone feel more insecure and more caught up in an obsession with her looks.

9. Getting support from other adults

Q "I know that my daughter gets really upset by the comments that her grandparents make sometimes. I've heard them telling her that she's 'filled out' and although I know they don't mean to be critical, I know that it makes her feel bad about the way she looks. What's the best way of tackling this without making even more of an issue out of it?"

A In this instance you're probably best off talking to the adults quietly. Suggest ways that they can make comments which show their delight in their grandchild's changing body or indicate that they may not want to comment on those changes at all. At the same time it is worth giggling with your daughter about how Gran doesn't feel comfortable saying she looks voluptuous or womanly and so she uses a silly synonym. That can help take the sting out! It may also open up a conversation about how your daughter feels about her own body. If so, you can encourage her to talk about any pressures she feels.

You don't need to have an answer for everything or to dispute what she says she feels about herself, even if you find it hard if she makes negative comments about herself. You can just listen and say things like "That's hard" and then sometime later you can let her see you looking at her with a smile and say...

"I hope soon you'll be able to see how lovely you are"

Dove Self-Esteem Project Global Advisory Board

The DSEP Advisory Board is a collection of people who feel passionate about strengthening body confidence. They guide the development of DSEP resources to benefit millions of young people. To demonstrate their passion for this important work, members have kindly given some of their time for free. We are grateful that so many wonderful people are happy to work in this way.

DSEP Global Advisory Board members include:

Dr. Ann Kearney-Cooke
USA, psychologist, workshop leader, author of Change Your Mind, Change Your Body

Dr. Carla Rice
Canada, Professor of women's studies and consulting clinician at the Women's College Health Sciences Centre in Toronto

Catherine Barry
Ireland, short story writer and novelist including 'Skin Deep', a novel on breast enlargement

Chiho Kusaka
Japan, TV presenter and self-esteem trainer and career counselor, particularly for young girls

Jessica Weiner
USA, international self-esteem trainer and author. Appears regularly on TV and is a contributing editor for Seventeen Magazine

Kaisu Fagan
UK, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Girlguiding UK Magazine

Karishma Chugani
Morocco, fashion designer working on a range of garments that embrace diversity in size and beauty

Dr. Lucrecia Ramirez
Colombia, psychiatrist and challenging fashion-show organiser

Mirjam Bekker-Stoop
Netherlands, cause-related photographic exhibition producer

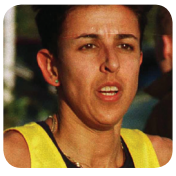
Dr. Nancy Etcoff
USA, psychologist, Harvard faculty member, author of Survival of the Prettiest – The Science of Beauty

Rankin
UK, 'A'-list fashion photographer, joint creator of Dazed & Confused magazine, film director and broadcaster

Sarah Lang
USA, World Championship medalist speed skater, school workshop leader

Dr. Susie Orbach
UK, psychoanalyst, author of 'Fat is a Feminist Issue' and 'Bodies', convenor of www.any-body.org

Wiam Al-Ashgar
Saudi Arabia, Clinical Dietician, works in education on healthy diets

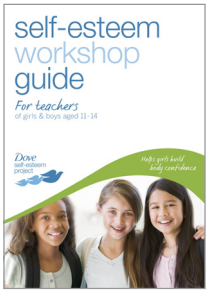


Zara Hyde-Peters
UK, former international athlete and UK Sport Board Member, CEO of British Triathlon

Meet the family – further resources

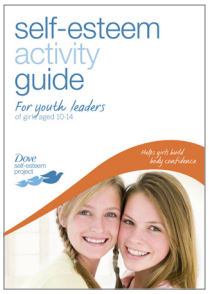
The Dove Self-Esteem Project aims to help the next generation develop body confidence, so that they can achieve their full potential in life.

As part of this, we have created this workshop guide within a range of body confidence and self-esteem educational tools. You can find other resources at **www.dove.com**



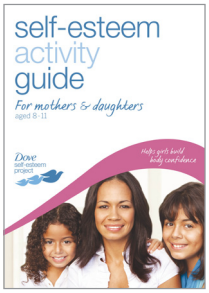
Dove Self-Esteem Workshop Guide for Teachers of girls and boys 11-14

A comprehensive set of materials to lead a 90 minute in-class session on body confidence and self-esteem, plus follow-up exercises. This resource is to be used in conjunction with poster and a Powerpoint presentation.



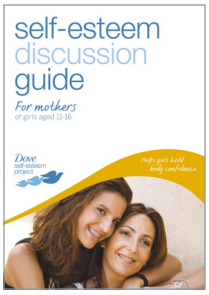
Dove Self-Esteem Activity Guide for Youth Leaders of girls aged 10-14

A printed toolkit with sufficient material for up to 18 fun sessions on body confidence and self-esteem. Suitable for Girl Guides / Girl Scouts, after School Clubs and other youth groups for girls.



Dove Self-Esteem Activity Guide for Mothers & Daughters aged 8-11

An activity booklet for use in the home to help mothers and daughters in their conversations about body confidence and self-esteem



Dove Self-Esteem Discussion Guide for Mothers of girls aged 11-16

A useful question and answer booklet to support mothers in tackling sensitive body confidence issues with their older daughters

Other resources and inspiration

There are many sources of useful stimulus and support materials to help you in your body confidence interventions. Here is a selection that you might choose to use.

Films

'Freaky Friday' (2003) (USA:PG) An overworked mother and her daughter find it hard to get along. When they switch bodies, each is forced to adapt to the other's life for one freaky Friday. Stars: Jamie Lee Curtis and Lindsay Lohan

'The Sisterhood Of The Travelling Pants' (2005) (USA:PG) Follows four teenage girls during a summer in which each goes through a crucial life experience that affects their self-esteem. They succeed due to their loyal support of each other, symbolised by a pair of jeans (the „Travelling Pants") that they take turns to wear. Stars: America Ferrera.

'Shrek' (2001) (USA:PG) A great family film. A green ogre sets out to rehome the fairytale creatures that have been placed in his swamp by the scheming Lord Farquaad. On his journey, he has to rescue Princess Fiona who has surprising issues with her appearance... Features the voices of Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy and Cameron Diaz.

Documentaries

'America The Beautiful' (2007) (Edited version USA:PG-13) Tackles America's obsession with beauty. It mainly chronicles a 12 year old model becoming a grown-up in the fashion industry, but also touches on plastic surgery, celebrity worship, airbrushed advertising and human insecurities.

'Beauty Mark' (2008) Presents an alarming, infuriating and at times humorous look at the forces that shape our perceptions of beauty, as seen through the eyes of psychotherapist and former world-class triathlete Diane Israel. She tells her own story while interviewing other champion athletes, body builders, fashion models and inner-city teens about their experiences relating to self-image.

Books

'Survival of the Prettiest, the Science of Beauty' (1999) by Dr. Nancy Etcoff, Director, Program in Aesthetics and Well Being, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard.
Why do gentlemen prefer blondes? Why do women paint their lips red? Why do men strive for V-shaped torsos? What is beauty?

'Bodies' (2009) by Dr Susie Orbach, UK
Some 30 years after the publication of 'Fat Is A Feminist Issue', this book argues that the way we view our bodies has become the mirror of how we view ourselves, raising fundamental questions about how we arrived here.

'Skin Deep' (2004) by Catherine Barry, Ireland
A novel about a young woman who believes that, if only she was beautiful and sexy, she would find the happiness she desperately craves. Can you really achieve happiness by going under the knife?

'Life Doesn't Begin 5 Pounds From Now' (2006) by Jessica Weiner, USA
A step by step guide to decoding the Language of Fat and loving your body today. By changing your thoughts, language and actions, you can appreciate your body more.

'Real Gorgeous' (1996) by Kaz Cooke, Australia
Full of cartoons and no-nonsense information about cosmetics, health and self-esteem for women aged 11 to 111. It includes "the truth about press ups, push-ups bras and the great cellulite scam."

Organisations that actively promote body confidence

Girl Scouts / Girl Guides

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts is a worldwide Movement providing non-formal education where girls and young women develop leadership, self-esteem and other life skills through self-development, challenge and adventure. The World Association brings together organisations in 145 countries across the globe and you can find yours at **www.wagggsworld.org/en/world**

Eating Disorders charities

Low body confidence can increase the risk of developing eating disorders. Eating disorders charities believe that prevention is better than cure and so campaign to improve people's feelings about body image. beat, the leading UK charity for people with eating disorders and their families, have an excellent directory of support websites from around the world at **www.b-eat.co.uk/Links/Overseasorganisations**

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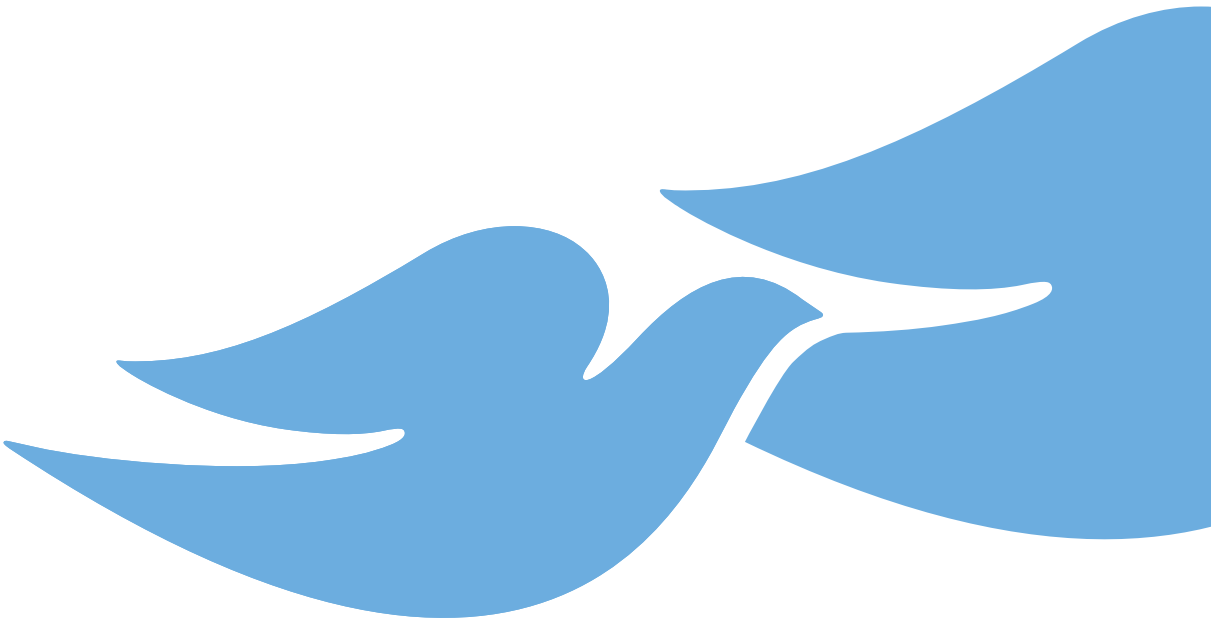
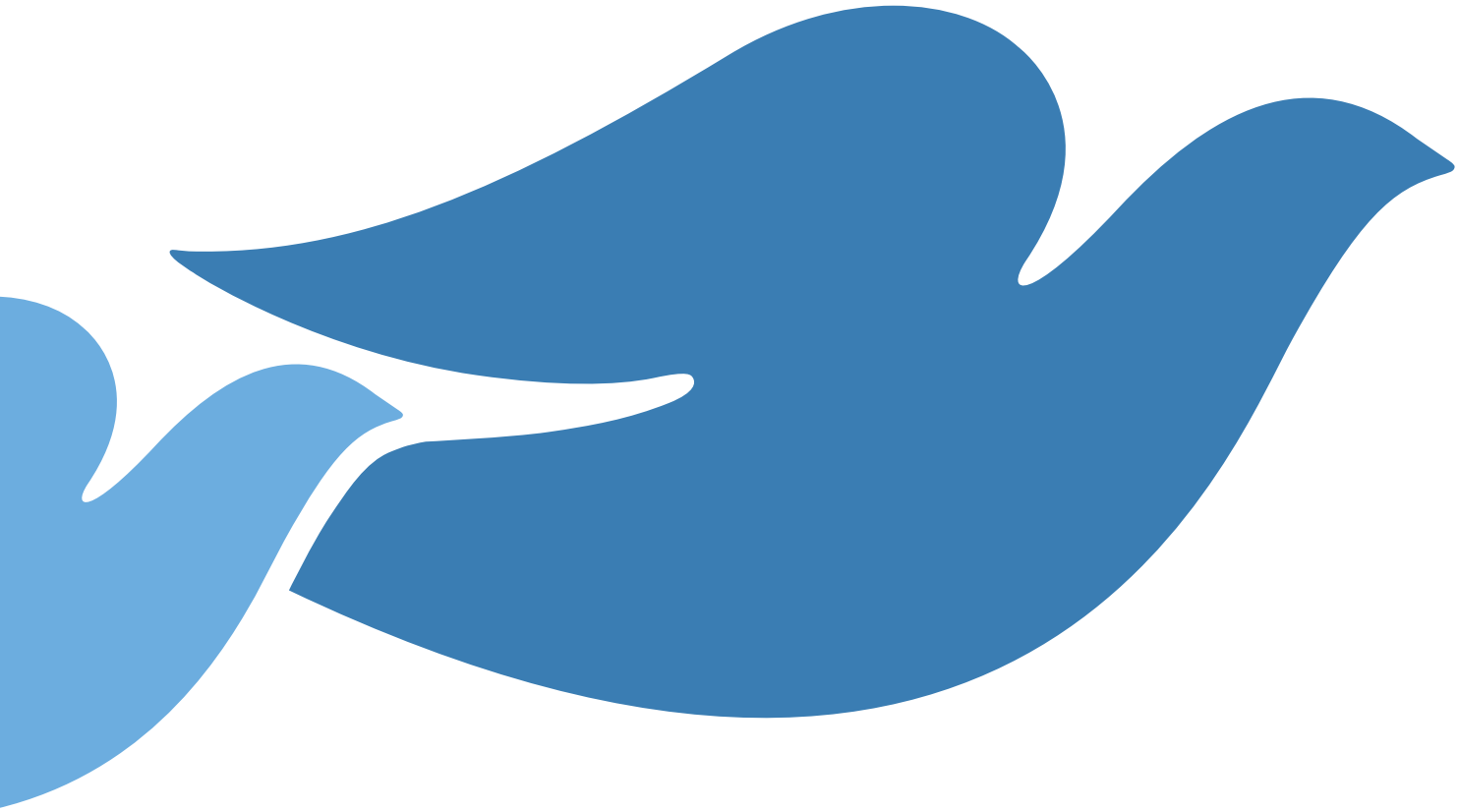
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