

Body Image Lessons From A Duck



It can be challenging to raise children in today's world when many of the images they see all across various media platforms are of unnatural bodies and unhealthy people. Whether we blame Hollywood, Madison Avenue, or Silicon Valley for setting warped standards for human beauty, sex appeal, and fitness, it does not matter. What we need to do is educate teen-agers, tweenies, and children about accepting themselves and others for who they are, regardless of their looks, body shape, or size.

As I raise three children now, often I think back to my childhood. Growing up, it's almost impossible not to be acutely aware of our body and looks. Typically, one is surrounded by people who judge you harshly by unreal expectations and demands, some of which are perpetuated in our movies, television shows, commercials, social media, and public events.

Today's generation has it tougher, exposed to digitally altered images of surgically enhanced celebrities and models. Teens can develop harmful eating disorders to keep up. Many obsess over their body image because of unrealistic images portrayed in our cultural content. Many kids will bully others simply for having a different body type or look.

Parents can help protect children from falling prey to pressures to conform to extreme standards?

One of the reasons I wrote *Ack! The Nantucket Duckling*, a story about a unique-looking duck who was ostracized by the community to show why it is important to treat everyone fairly and respectfully.

In the book, which became an Amazon best-seller, we see how the duck's unusual-looking and sounding beak is ridiculed. We know how body shaming is harmful and denies others in seeing the true beauty and value that we each possess.

We want children to feel comfortable in their own skin, regardless of their physical traits. We want to encourage them to be healthy and look their best. We don't want them feeling insecure, ashamed, or hateful of their bodies. And we don't want them taking pills, undergoing unnecessary surgeries, or engaging in unbalanced diets that cause them to damage themselves.

Parents can help when they:

- Talk to their children about how they see themselves and ask if others ridicule them over their body type.
- Explain the dangers of extreme dieting and eating disorders.
- Learn the signs of someone who suffers from an eating disorder so you can help your child get therapy if he or she is not well.
- Show them how what they see is not necessarily healthy or real. Explain how images are altered or how many models are not healthy.
- Encourage them to accept themselves as they are but not to use it as an excuse to not eat healthy and exercise.
- Show them news articles online about how times are changing. For instance, Victoria's Secret no longer will market only half-naked, thin, busty, and gorgeous "angels" to sell lingerie. *Sports Illustrated* now portrays plus sized women in its annual bathing suit issue. Newer brands are built on projecting and serving a variety of body images, such as Summersalt, Thinx, and Girlfriend Collective.

Studies show 4% of adolescents and teens, ages 13 to 18, suffer from an anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder. Many more are bullied over their size, shape, looks, and body image.

Ack had a body image problem. Not only did others see him negatively, he started to doubt himself and see himself as others do. But his criticized body part — his beak — helped rescue someone and the community, as a result, came to see him favorably and embraced him.

We need to embrace the Acks amongst us. None of us should not have to save the day for each of us to be appreciated and valued. Begin to help your children explore their body image and help them like what they see in the mirror.

A.K. Spurway, certified in Positive Parenting, is a mom of three young children. She is the founder and CEO of www.Nanducket.com, an empowering family lifestyle company, and the best-selling author of *Ack! The Nantucket Duckling*. Her mission is to help inspire kids to celebrate their differences, so they grow up in a kinder world that's more inclusive, diverse, and rejects bullying.