

## FACT SHEET 14

# Body Image and Self-Esteem

Body image is how you view your physical self – including whether you feel you are attractive and what you believe others think of you. If you have a positive body image, you probably like and accept yourself the way you are, even if you don't necessarily fit into what others would consider to be the 'ideal'.

Self-esteem is related to how much you value yourself and how important you think you are. Having a positive self-esteem is important because feeling good about yourself can enhance your physical and mental health. For many people, especially young people in their teens, body image perception can be closely linked to self-esteem. Self-esteem can be influenced by the changes occurring during puberty, by the 'ideal' projected in the media, the attitudes of family and friends, and experiences at school.

Perceptions of self-esteem and body image start developing from a very early age. School-age children can be very aware of differences between people and can experience peer pressure related to body image. It is during the school years, and particularly during adolescence, that your child may become preoccupied with how they look. This may be related to their limb difference or just a general self-evaluation of their body and image as a whole.

This Fact Sheet provides information about how to help your child to have a positive body image and self-esteem, including links to organisations that can support.

## Supporting your child to have a positive body image

It is usually those closest to a child or young person that have the most significant impact on the development of their self-esteem. Often a child's perception of him or herself is modelled on the behaviour and attitudes of the parent, so it is important to be mindful of the body image messages you send out. A positive body image will strengthen your child's self-esteem.

As a parent or carer, you can support your child to have a positive body image and self-esteem by:

- > encouraging your child to participate in physical activities that they have a natural interest and aptitude in
- > focusing on your child's strengths and give him or her positive affirmation and encouragement
- > encouraging open conversations with your child and being prepared to calmly and honestly respond to any questions, concerns or issues raised
- > encouraging your child to accept their body
- > reassuring your child that everyone is different in some way, which is what makes us all individual and unique
- > reassuring your child that people with limb or other differences do develop positive long-term relationships
- > speaking to your Prosthetist about cosmetic options if this is a concern held by your child.

## Using visual resources

Children's books featuring characters with a limb difference can help a child to have greater self-esteem and identify with characters that 'look like me' or are 'different like me'. Books can also help children to talk about their limb difference openly and answer questions from friends.

A number of doll-makers are producing ones that feature children with a range of disabilities and health conditions, including limb difference. Dolls can be a great way for children to relate to a toy that 'looks like me' or that can be used when playing with other children.

## Bullying

While this does not happen to all children with limb difference, some may experience teasing or bullying. Teasing or bullying can negatively affect a child's body image and self-esteem. This can be particularly troubling during childhood and adolescence as it is during these years that building positive relationships and being included in a friendship group is very important. A separate Fact Sheet about bullying discusses this matter in more detail.

## Accessing support

Should you think that your child, you or another person close to you needs assistance to manage body image or self-esteem issues, there are a number of services you may want to access. You may want to consider speaking with your GP, a Social Worker or a Psychologist.

A number of organisations and online websites provide advice and tips to assist children and young people maintain positive body image and self-esteem, including:

### Beyond Blue

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

### Kids Helpline

[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

### Headspace

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

### Reach Out

[www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)