

How To Help Your Daughter Develop A Realistic Self-Image

from the American Counseling Association

Unfortunately, society today forces upon young women images of perfection that are unrealistic and unhealthy. From the covers of teen magazines to countless television ads and music videos, our daughters are bombarded with images of pencil-thin yet voluptuous models whose message is clearly "be like me to be successful and accepted."

These unrelenting media images have a subtle, but certain effect on how girls view themselves -- an effect that's being seen at an ever younger age. You see it in girls who dress to mimic the fashions of female music, TV and movie stars. You see it in young women constantly worrying about weight and appearance, or who lose interest in academics, music, art or sports in order to focus more on their physical appearance and popularity with boys.

While it may be impossible to stop the avalanche of unrealistic media images, there are ways to counter this propaganda within your own house.

Start by simply talking with your daughter about the media images she's seeing. Watch some of the TV shows and music videos she's watching. Read some of the magazines she reads. Then talk with her about how realistically some of these women are being portrayed.

Ask her if this is how she or her friends really act, speak or look. Ask her about the messages being presented and how they make her feel. Are such feelings fair or realistic? Discuss the realities of advertising and other media presentations of women. It's easy for a young girl to accept the images being presented, while forgetting the make-up artists, hair stylists, designers, and photographers making such images possible.

You can also take action to help your daughter better recognize her own worth. Rather than complimenting her and other young women on their looks, compliment them on their interests, creativity, intellect, ideas and accomplishments. Encourage her to continue to develop her interests in art, music, sports or other activities, or help her develop new interests in areas other than appearance and popularity.

Rather than just allowing your daughter to be impressed by all the media images, help her gain a realistic perspective. Encourage your daughter to see her real value as a person, rather than measuring herself against unrealistic advertising images.

If you find your daughter is showing signs of depression related to her appearance or sense of self-worth, consider seeing a professional counselor specializing in adolescents and teens.

Counseling Corner is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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