

Helping Children

APPRECIATE THEIR BODIES

*What can we do to help
children and youth see their
bodies as gifts from God?*

By Marissa Widdison
Church Magazines

Picture a child in your life—a son, a niece, a friend’s child, or a youth in your ward. Imagine living a day in that child’s shoes. What messages are being taught about his or her body? Where are these messages coming from? How might these messages make the child feel?

Now imagine that same child with the Savior, perhaps in a setting similar to those described in the Bible or the Book of Mormon, or perhaps while sitting together in a family home evening. “He took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them” (3 Nephi 17:21). If the Savior were speaking to children about their bodies, what messages might He share? How would those messages make them feel?

We have the chance to be Christlike ministers to children, who receive mixed messages from the world about the worth of their bodies. As we talk openly with them in a safe and loving way, we can uplift, strengthen, and protect them. Here are some thoughts from professionals and Church



leaders that may prompt your own ideas for talking about our bodies and body-image issues with the children you love.

Seek Heavenly Help

Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher, can help us understand what and how we should teach our children.

“Remember, you are not alone. The Savior has promised that He will not leave you comfortless,” taught

Bishop Gary E. Stevenson, Presiding Bishop of the Church. He went on to say: “You have the Savior of the world on your side. If you seek His help and follow His directions, how can you fail?”¹

Teach Doctrine

“All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents.”² The poster on pages 74–75 (also found in the *Friend*, July 2014, 24–25) has scriptures and simple statements you could use to start a conversation about these and other important truths.



Identify Harmful Messages

Listen to what your children say about what is beautiful or desirable. Lindsay Kite, who has a PhD in the study of media and body image and co-directs the Beauty Redefined Foundation, describes how digitally altered media messages often present a narrow definition of what is ideal—tall, young, thin, tan women and extremely muscular men, for example. Pursuing these ideals becomes a lifelong struggle for some people. Sister Kite suggests trying a family media fast. Set a specific amount of time—anywhere from three days to a month—and avoid as much media as you can.

“Without this stream of idealized images and messages, you become more sensitive to those that are unrealistic

or that trigger anxiety,” Sister Kite says. “Then use that awareness to unsubscribe, un-like, un-follow, turn off, and turn away.”

Pornography is another way that harmful messages about the human body are delivered. Resources for talking about pornography and protecting your family from its influence can be found at overcomingpornography.org.³

Focus on the Positive

Parents can stop talking negatively about their own bodies and instead express gratitude for all the things bodies can do, says Justin McPheters, who has a PhD

in marriage and family therapy and works with LDS Family Services. Family outings, trips, and even injuries can give us opportunities to talk with our kids about how wonderful our bodies are.⁴

“We should regularly be highlighting all that our bodies are able to do,” Brother McPheters says. “Even a body with many physical limitations is able to do some wonderful things like smile, laugh, and cry.”

Consider Talking about Sexuality

Because the topics of sexuality and body image are related to and affect each other, a discussion about bodies could include a discussion about sexuality. The Church has produced a guidebook to help parents hold age-appropriate conversations with their children about intimacy and sexual development (available online at [lds.org/manual/a-parents-guide](https://www.lds.org/manual/a-parents-guide)).⁵

Talk about Bodies as Part of a Whole

The *Friend* magazine recently shared the true story of a girl who didn't like her freckles. When she looked in the mirror, that's all she seemed to see. Her mom encouraged her to pick up a pebble and hold it close to her eye.

“What do you see?” she asked. The daughter responded that all she could see was the rock. The mom told her to put the pebble down and take another look. Now what did she see?

“Lots of things,” the daughter said, pointing out the ground, flowers, and grass. The mom then taught the daughter that she is much more than just her freckles—she's smart and patient and a daughter of God.

“Think of yourself as a whole garden, not just one pebble. Then you'll be able to see yourself the way the Savior sees you.”⁶

As we teach our children these important truths with the help of the Spirit, our own testimony of the plan of salvation can be strengthened, and—as one Primary song so beautifully expresses it—we can “follow God's plan for [us], holding fast to his word and his love.”⁷ ■

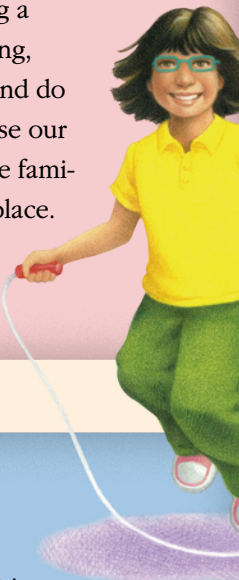
NOTES

1. Gary E. Stevenson, “Your Four Minutes,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 85, 86.
2. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.
3. Visit the “Resources” section of [overcomingpornography.org](https://www.overcomingpornography.org) for suggested family home evening lesson plans.
4. See Susan W. Tanner, “The Sanctity of the Body,” and Jeffrey R. Holland, “To Young Women,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 13–15, 28–30.
5. For brief videos on talking to children about sexuality, visit [lds.org/go/intimacyE615](https://www.lds.org/go/intimacyE615).
6. See Kelly J. Hunsaker, “Freckles and Pebbles,” *Friend*, Oct. 2014, 26–27.
7. “I Will Follow God's Plan,” *Children's Songbook*, 165.



WHAT'S GREAT ABOUT HAVING A BODY?

Our bodies are so important and holy that the Lord calls them temples (see 1 Corinthians 3:16–17). And having a body is fun too! Bodies can run, sing, climb, laugh, draw, swim, dance, and do other fun activities. Also, we can use our bodies to learn, help people, create families, and make the world a better place.



WHY DO WE HAVE BODIES?

Before we were born, we were spirits without physical bodies. There were a lot of things we couldn't do until we had a body. God sent us to earth to get bodies. We need both a spirit and a body to become like Heavenly Father. (See D&C 88:15.)

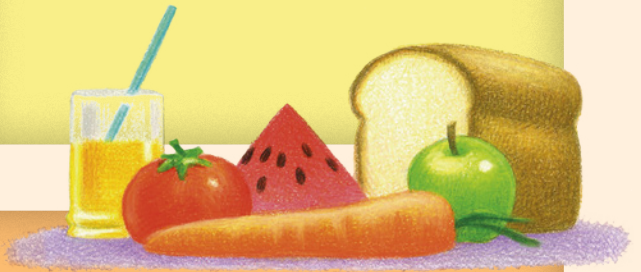
My Body

WHAT IF THERE ARE THINGS I DON'T LIKE ABOUT MY BODY?

Sometimes our bodies don't look, move, or work the way we want them to. But no matter what our bodies are like, we can choose to be grateful for them and use them to do good things here on earth. Someday, each one of us will be resurrected and have a body that is perfect (see Alma 40:23). God loves us no matter what our bodies are like, and we can love ourselves too.

WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE LOOK ALIKE?

Bodies come in many shapes, colors, and sizes, and this is part of Heavenly Father's plan. Even though each body is different, all of us are created in the image of God (see Genesis 1:26). That means that our bodies are patterned after His perfect body. Every single body is beautiful because each one is a gift from our loving Heavenly Father.



HOW SHOULD I TREAT MY BODY?

We should treat our bodies the way we would care for any priceless treasure—with love and respect. Through the prophets and the Word of Wisdom, Heavenly Father has told us what is bad for our bodies and what is good. There are lots of things we can do to care for our bodies:

- Eat healthy foods and exercise.
- Dress modestly and keep our bodies clean.
- Respect other people's bodies.
- Don't mark our bodies with tattoos or piercings.
- Don't use drugs, alcohol, tobacco, coffee, or tea.
- Play games that are safe and fun and stay away from activities that are dangerous.

When we take care of our bodies, we are better able to feel the Holy Ghost.

*As we care for our bodies the way God has commanded, we will be blessed!
(See Mosiah 2:41; D&C 89:18–21.)*

Is a **TEMPLE**

