

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### Helping Your Daughter Find A Healthy Self-Image

from the American Counseling Association

One reason life is interesting is that we aren't all the same. We don't all sound, think or look alike. But if you're a young woman being bombarded by images of super-thin women in revealing fashions, there's a good chance you're feeling pressure to look and act like someone you're not.

TV, the Internet, social media and magazines are full of photos of actors, models and entertainers presented as perfect examples of the modern woman. At the same time they're often shown as "arm candy" for some handsome, successful male, with the clearly implied message that you have to be perfectly beautiful and super sexy if you're to be popular and find that "perfect" guy.

If you have a daughter who seems obsessed with looking like those media presentations of women, then publicity, marketing and advertising messages may be pushing her to be overly self-critical. She may have lost interest in things that used to matter to her, such as sports, music or art, and instead seems constantly worried about her physical appearance and popularity with boys.

Media influences can be overwhelming, but there are ways to help counter them. One is to stop complimenting your daughter and other young women on their looks, and instead offer praise for their creativity, intellect, interests, ideas and accomplishments. Try encouraging her to continue her involvement with things that held her interest earlier, or to develop new interests in areas other than beauty and popularity.

It also helps to have discussions with her about what's influencing her. Take time to watch some of her favorite TV shows or music videos, and to read some of the magazines she reads. Ask her how realistic some of the actions and looks there are in comparison with people she actually knows. Talk about the way photos of celebrities and models are doctored to make them appear thinner, prettier and blemish-free.

You can also help her to learn more about women who can serve as more positive role models. Today there are growing numbers of women who have achieved success in business, the arts and media based on their talents and abilities, not their looks.

Opening up communications with your daughter about these messages and the problems they can cause can help give her a better perspective on these issues and help her better appreciate the person she actually is.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

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words: 393