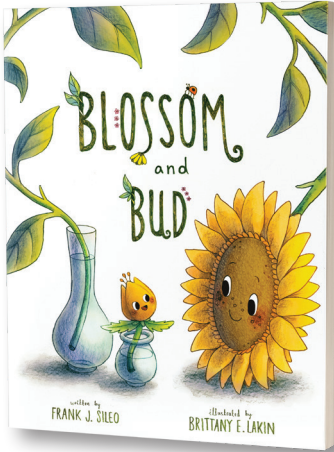




## Fostering a Positive Body Image, Part 1



We are all different shapes, sizes, and colors, each of us special in our own way. *Blossom and Bud* by Frank J. Sileo, PhD was written to help children respect, accept and appreciate how their own and others' bodies are beautiful and different in their own ways. It was also written to foster discussion in a safe and comfortable environment with the caregivers in their lives.

Understanding individual differences and body diversity may help children build self-esteem, feel kindness toward themselves and others, practice healthy eating, have more realistic expectations of their appearance, and possess a healthy body image.

In his Note to Adult Gardeners in *Blossom and Bud*, Dr. Sileo provides suggestions about nurturing a positive body image in children. Here's an excerpt explaining body image and when to seek professional help. We'll post a second excerpt with tips for fostering a healthy body image.

### What Is Body Image?

Body image is how a person feels about and views their body, which contributes to their own self-image. Children can develop a positive or negative perception of their body.

A child with a positive body image feels comfortable about their body. As a result, they display more confidence, take better care of their body, and have higher self-esteem. They tend to have more energy and engage in physical activities.

A child with a negative body image tends to feel less satisfied with their body and may feel more anxious, self-conscious, and isolated from others. They may be more preoccupied with calories, weight, or food intake; unfairly compare themselves with others; have lower self-esteem; and engage in disordered eating.

The way children see themselves and others may be based on standards set forth by others in their lives. It is difficult to ignore the images of the "ideal" body conveyed to our children by many forms of media. Peers can also be powerful influences on children's perceptions of self. Parents and other adults in their lives may also be sending messages directly or indirectly about how children's bodies should look and how they should feel about their bodies.

There is a tendency in our culture to favor bodies that are thin, muscular, or “perfect.” Of course, a “perfect” body does not exist, and focusing on perfection can lead to frustration, disappointment, and other mental health issues. As parents and caregivers, we want to help encourage children to develop healthy mindsets and realistic expectations about their bodies, and to learn how to take care of their bodies through eating healthy and getting regular exercise.

### When Body Image Becomes a Growing Problem

Being concerned about body image and at times being self-conscious about one’s appearance is a typical part of growing up. However, if you should notice your child

- becoming depressed
- being bullied
- struggling with their self-esteem
- skipping meals
- engaging in severe dieting
- withdrawing from others
- making repeated, negative statements about themselves like “I hate my body,” or “I’m ugly,” or
- engaging in self-harm behavior

it is best to seek consultation with a mental health professional. The APA therapist locator can help you find a therapist near you.

Part 2 of the excerpt from the Note to Adult Gardeners, *Fostering a Healthy Body Image*, will post next week.

#### This Article’s Author

Frank J. Sileo, PhD, is a New Jersey licensed psychologist and the founder and executive director of the Center for Psychological Enhancement in Ridgewood, New Jersey. He received his doctorate from Fordham University in New York City.

In his practice, Dr. Sileo works with children, adolescents, adults, and families. Since 2010, he has been consistently recognized as one of New Jersey’s top kids’ doctors.

He has authored several children’s books including: *A World of Pausabilities: An Exercise in Mindfulness*, *Did You Hear?: A Story About Gossip*, *Bug Bites and Campfires: A Story for Kids About Homesickness*, and *Sally Sore Loser: A Story About Winning and Losing*, which is the Gold Medal recipient of the prestigious Mom’s Choice Award.