



# ME AND MY BODY

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# 1. WHY A BOOK ON THE BODY?

Children today live in a cyber-connected, sexualised global village. Every aspect of their life—social media, advertising, music, books, television, the very toys they play with and, sadly, pornography—screams messages to children that tell them they have to achieve some ideal of body image and status of sexual activity if they are to be popular, significant and loved.

In the individualistic narcissistic culture we live in, a child is encouraged to be ‘true to yourself’, to experiment with body image, dress, behaviour, and even their sexual identity such that he/she can be truly who he/she wants to be at any given time, on any given day.

The cyber world of social media directs children to evaluate popularity and significance according to how well they are able to project this newly discovered self to the world and gather some ephemeral collection of likes, ratings and downloads in a myriad of apps and internet sites.

This, they are told, will determine who they are. Their very identity.

Does this leave children happy and content?

All the research says no. The rates of mental illness, serious body image concerns, self-harm, pornography use, and even child-on-child abuse are all at unacceptable levels in our community.

This is why we wrote this book.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

Below are some references to help you understand and deal with these issues:

- Beyond Blue, <https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/footer/stats-and-facts>
- ‘The mental health of children and adolescents’, The Australian Government Department of Health, <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-m-child2>
- ‘2017 Annual youth survey’, Mission Australia, <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-evaluation/youth-survey>

# 2. WHAT WILL THIS BOOK DO?

This book will help you to discuss:

- how precious each person’s body is irrespective of who they are or what they look like (pp. 3–7; 14–17; 28–31).
- factors that affect body image and how to manage these (pp. 8–11)
- issues of cyber-use including sexting and cyberbullying (pp. 12–13)
- the importance of parents in teaching children the value of their body and how to best manage the pressures of culture (pp. 18–21)
- good and bad touch (pp. 22–27).



### 3. TEACHING MOMENTS IN THIS BOOK

#### PAGES 3–7; 14–17; 28–31 HOW PRECIOUS EACH PERSON'S BODY IS IRRESPECTIVE OF WHO THEY ARE OR WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE

Use the following passages from the Bible, or others you may be familiar with, to teach your child why God thinks their body is important:

God created *you*:

Genesis 1:27 says 'God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them'.

God knew *you* from the moment of conception:

Psalms 139:13 says, 'you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb'.

Christ died for *you*—your body, and the bodies of all those around you, all belong to Jesus:

1 Corinthians 6:15a says, 'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? ...' 19–20 says, 'Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies'.

Jesus wants *you* to worship *him* with your body.

Romans 12:1b says, '... offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship'.

Jesus is coming back. *you*, your family and all who believe in him will be with him forever.

Romans 6:5 says, 'For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his'.

1 Corinthians 15:42b says, 'The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable ...' 52b says, 'For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed'.

**Share** with your child your personal struggles with any aspect of personal identity or self-esteem when you were a young child.

Search on the web with your child to find pictures of children from different countries. Discuss how our bodies are different and our clothes and mannerisms are different—but all bodies are precious to God.

**Ask** them about the children in their class or school.

Go back to the Bible verses and ask the child 'What does this mean for you and me today?'

*Hint:*

*You are not what your mirror—or your friends—or Instagram—or your social media profile says you are.*

*You are a child of God—as are your friends—and you do more than tolerate and accept those who are not the same as you: you love them as God loves you.*

**Tell** your child that you'd rather see them live their life as an authentic, imperfect self than an image constructed to please others. Point out that if they seek perfection in everything, they are likely to feel like a failure.

**Help** your child understand that his or her image as a girl or boy comes through intelligence, kindness, and respecting others and not outward appearance.

You may want to sing a song with your kids! One good one is 'Just the way God wanted us to be' by Sovereign Grace: <http://sovereigngracemusic.org/music/songs/just-the-way-god-wanted-us-to-be/>

**Phrases you may need to explain:**

Pages 4–5: If you are reading this book before the book 'Me and My Family', you may have to stop and explain how the sperm and ovum fuse to form a baby.

Be prepared also to discuss the basics of sexual intercourse.

#### PAGES 8–11 FACTORS THAT AFFECT BODY IMAGE AND HOW TO MANAGE THESE

The goal is to teach your child to understand the ways the media and other sources will try to influence their self-image.

You want to help your child understand that:

- all toys and media are things that somebody made, and they don't necessarily reflect what is real in the world
- most media is made so that people can make money.
- people at different times and different places have different ideas of what is a good body shape and what is acceptable behaviour for boys and for girls
- above all, none of this matters as much as the fact that your child is a child of God. God loves him or her just the way he or she is.



## Here are some [conversation starters](#)

1. Your child might play a lot with action figures that have exaggerated muscles. Play with them while you discuss:
  - How does this toy's body compare with that of your friends? Teachers? Uncle? Dad?
  - Why do you think the toy-makers make action figures to look like this?
  - Do you need to have big muscles to be a hero?
  - Is there anyone you know who you think is a hero, but doesn't have big muscles?
  - What then makes a person a hero?
2. Your child might love TV, internet or video games where the hero is hypermasculine with a large muscled body and a rough, tough attitude, or where the heroine is super fit and muscled; and problems are solved by violence and getting rid of the 'enemy'. Watch or play with your child. Then discuss:
  - How are the good guys and girls and bad guys and girls portrayed in this?
  - Do people you know look and act like this?
  - What does this tell us about the difference between what we are seeing and playing, and the real world?
  - What does this say to us about solving problems? Are there other ways we can solve problems?
  - How would Jesus have us solve problems?
3. Your child likes playing with dolls with sexualised bodies. Spend some time playing with your child. While you play, discuss:
  - What do you like about this doll?
  - What do you not like?
  - Why do you think dolls that are thin and tall (and whatever other characteristics that particular doll has) are popular? Have you seen dolls that are not like this?
  - How do these dolls compare with women and girls you know and love? Friends, Teachers, Aunty, Mum?
  - Do you have to look like these dolls to be a loving, kind person?

4. If your child likes to watch TV shows and music videos that promote certain unhelpful body types, moves and behaviours, and imply that this is how a person should be and behave to be popular and attractive, watch with them and then discuss:
  - What does this tell us is important about a person? Looks? Body shape? Behaviour?
  - How does this compare with the way people you know and love look like and behave?
  - How does this compare with what God would want you to look like and how God would want you to behave?

## Further information on body image

Below are some references to help you in dealing with these issues:

- Sierra Filucci, 2016, '5 ways parents of pre-schoolers can raise a body-positive kid', *Common Sense Media*, <https://www.common sense media.org/blog/5-ways-parents-of-preschoolers-can-raise-a-body-positive-kid>
- For girls: Caroline Knorr, 2015, 'Girls and body image', *Common Sense Media*, <https://www.common sense media.org/blog/girls-and-body-image>
- For boys: Caroline Knorr, 2015, 'Boys and body image', *Common Sense Media*, <https://www.common sense media.org/blog/boys-and-body-image>

## Tips on media literacy for you and your children

You can find a useful 'tip sheet' on how to use the media as an age-appropriate 'teaching moment'. Below are some helpful ones:

- 'Talking to kids about media and body image', *Media Smarts*, [http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/tip-sheet/tipsheet\\_media\\_effects\\_on\\_body\\_image.pdf](http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/tip-sheet/tipsheet_media_effects_on_body_image.pdf)
- 'Boys, girls and media messages', *Common Sense Media*, <https://www.common sense media.org/blog/boys-girls-and-media-messages>

## Phrases you may need to explain

Page 9: 'walk and talk in ways that are not healthy for children your age': you may want to explain what this means. Discuss how some children copy what they see on TV, videos and toys. They behave like older people in the way they dress and move, showing off the parts of their body that are special and are best kept covered.



## PAGES 12–13 ISSUES OF CYBER-USE INCLUDING SEXTING AND CYBER-BULLYING

There is no place for passive parenting in the digital age. It's time for parents to have more tech talks. Parents, you already have the most important tool for raising a generation of responsible, God-honouring digital natives: your voice! You need to be the first and most important voice they hear.

The website *Protect Young Eyes* has an excellent resource in their *Parent Tech Talks E-book*, <https://protectyouneyes.com/content/parent-tech-talks-e-book/> download it and read the sections for preschoolers and elementary schoolers.

This ebook provides conversation guides for each age and stage of life, in all of the unusual and awkward spaces, like sexting, pornography, social media, bullying and self-image. Where parents are unsure, we want to provide certainty. We hope parents will use this ebook to practise, look their kids in the eye, and have intentional, persistent and consistent conversations (pray for the right timing—God will help you).

When this happens, and parents say the right things at the right times, we believe it plants seeds of trust and certainty in the hearts and minds of their kids.

### HELPFUL RESOURCES

Below are some more helpful resources on this topic.

- 'Cyberbullying', *Protect Young Eyes*, <https://protectyouneyes.com/internet-dangers/cyberbullying/>
- Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner, 'Cyberbullying', *iParent*, <https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent/online-risks/cyberbullying/>

**Discuss** with your child how the concept of 'bullying' isn't new. Describe how, when you were young, bullying and teasing occurred face to face in the playground. But this was different because you could generally leave it behind when you went home.

Today with cyber-bullying, the teasing and cruelty stays with you 24 hours of every day.

**Discuss** what your child would do if they had a friend who was being bullied.

Challenge your child to think about what Jesus might want them to do.

### HELPFUL RESOURCES

Always be aware of the danger:

- Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner, 'How do I know if my child is being cyberbullied?', *iParent*, <https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent/online-risks/cyberbullying/how-do-i-know-if-my-child-is-being-cyberbullied>

And, be ready to respond if your child has been cyber-bullied:

- Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner, 'A guide to responding to cyber-bullying', *iParent*, <https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent/online-risks/cyberbullying/a-parents-guide-to-responding>

We have put together some of the current information in a document 'Cyber-smart parenting'. This is available for you to download.

## PAGES 14–17 JESUS AND YOU

**Read** some of the instances in the Bible which show how Jesus treated people.

Matthew 9, John 8:2–11 and Mark 5:25–24 give several examples of Jesus' compassion towards people and the value he placed on them, even if they were considered 'outcasts'.

Matthew 18:21–28 also shows Jesus listening to and granting the request of the Canaanite woman when the disciples wanted to send her away.

Matthew 19:13–15 also shows Jesus' care and value for children.

## PAGES 18–21 THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS IN TEACHING CHILDREN THE VALUE OF THEIR BODY AND HOW TO BEST MANAGE THE PRESSURES OF CULTURE

Only when children understand where they come from and where they are going can they understand who they are.

The only way to protect our children from an over-sexualised culture that gives them a false sense of worth is to give them a far more compelling vision of their true worth.

**Read** again the creation story (Genesis 1 and 2) and discuss what it means to be made in the image of God.



**Discuss** how, because of sin and our separation from God, his design and standards for man and woman are misaligned and undermined. And we fail to live up to our divine destiny and dignity. Discuss how Jesus alone was the image of God (Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:1–4). Explain how it is only in Christ that we can be restored and renewed (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24), until we are finally glorified with him (Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49). We don't have to live by the cultural pressures to meet some standard of body, activity or achievement —sexual or otherwise.

A strong foundation of Christ-focused identity will give your children the strength to resist the pressures of culture, social media and peer norms of body image and behaviour. They will be empowered to live countercultural lives (Romans 12:1–2).

**Share** with your child what the clothes and customs were when you were their age. Bring out a photo album.

**Discuss** how people in different countries and cultures dress, and how something that is taken for granted in one culture can be considered shameful in another.

Look at pictures of men and women from different cultures.

### **Wise and unwise ways to dress**

This could be a good time to discuss wise and unwise choices of dress.

You may find this article on 'Modesty' useful.

### **HELPFUL RESOURCES**

Below are some helpful resources on this topic:

- Meggie Cottonethal, 2017, 'Modesty misunderstood', *Desiring God*, May 20, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/modesty-misunderstood>
- Luke Gilkerson, 2013, '6 marks of biblical modesty: How God brings sexy back', *Covenant Eyes*, August 16, <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2013/08/16/biblical-definition-of-modesty/>

## **PAGES 22–27 GOOD AND BAD TOUCH AND GIVING CHILDREN AN ACTION PLAN TO DEAL WITH BAD TOUCH**

Intimacy is important at all ages. The apostle Paul ends his epistles with greetings to his friends, and instructs his readers to 'greet one another with a holy kiss' (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14).

**Discuss** with your child the many positive ways you can show affection: hugs, kisses, backrubs, holding hands, etc.

What are the appropriate ways (good touch) your family shows physical affection?

**Ask** your child how he/she likes to give/receive affection: Touch? Words? Time? Service?

**Read** the lessons below yourself, and use them with your child as you feel comfortable.

- 'A simple lesson for teaching your child about Good touch/Bad touch', *Educate Empower Kids*, [http://educateempowerkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EEK\\_GoodBadTouch\\_Lesson.pdf](http://educateempowerkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EEK_GoodBadTouch_Lesson.pdf)
- 'A simple lesson for teaching your child about predators', *Educate Empower Kids*, [http://educateempowerkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EEK\\_Predators\\_Lesson.pdf](http://educateempowerkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EEK_Predators_Lesson.pdf)
- Kimberley King, 2016, 'The 3 big red flags of sexual abuse', April 7, *Protect Young Minds*, <https://protectyoungminds.org/2016/04/07/3-big-red-flags-sexual-abuse/>

### **Plans for you and your child (as you and the child are comfortable)**

**List** people the child (and you) trust.

Now discuss how, even in these people, some forms of touch are good and some are bad.

**Ask** your child, 'What kind of touch do you like best? Hugs? Kisses? High fives? Fist bump?'

Ask your child, 'What should you do if someone touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable?'

Practise with your child what he/she should do if they feel uncomfortable.

Assure the child that he/she will never be punished if they tell you or a teacher about a 'bad' experience. Assure them that *you will* believe them.



## HELPFUL RESOURCES

For information on detecting and preventing child abuse

- Kristen Jenson, 2017, 'Warning signs of sexual abuse—How to protect your child', April 20, *Protect Young Minds*, <https://protectyoungminds.org/2017/04/20/warning-signs-child-sexual-abuse/>
- Amanda Scott, 'Kids and “affection”: Why I’m NOT teaching my kids to be polite', *Educate Empower Kids*, <http://educateempowerkids.org/3040-2/>

If you want to go deeper:

- 'What every child safety curriculum needs to include', *Generation Next*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b69Ec9OU6Fk>
- 'Educators are key to preventing child sexual abuse', *Generation Next*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBVwLH0sb14>

