

A pocket guide against body shaming

A deck of 12 hands-on
educational cards and action
scripts for body liberation and
empowerment of young women



What to say when someone comments on **your body**.

You don't owe anyone a response. But if you want one - having words ready makes it easier to stay calm, protect yourself, and be heard.

WHY IT HELPS TO BE PREPARED

Body comments - from family, friends, or strangers - can catch us off guard.

Having a few responses ready in advance helps you stay grounded and choose your reaction, rather than freeze or respond from distress.

READY-TO-USE RESPONSES - PICK WHAT FITS THE MOMENT



Set a boundary

"I'd prefer you didn't comment on my body. It's not something I want to discuss."
Simple and firm. No explanation required. Works well for repeat situations.



Name the assumption

"That comment assumes my body needs to change. I actually don't agree with that."
Challenges the belief calmly. Good when you have energy for a real conversation



Soft exit

"I feel fine about my body - shall we talk about something else?"
Protects your peace without confrontation. Just redirect and move forward.



"Turn it back (for close relationships)

"Why does my body feel like something you need to comment on?"
Creates space for reflection. Best with someone open to a real conversation.



You don't have to respond if you don't feel safe, if the person won't listen, or if you simply don't want to. **Choosing not to engage is also a valid response.**

"Protecting yourself is not aggression. It's self-respect."

What is **weight stigma**?

Weight stigma is something many of us have experienced - but rarely have a name for. Understanding it is the first step to pushing back against it.

DEFINITION

*Weight stigma is the **discrimination, judgment, and negative treatment** that people experience because of their body size. It shows up in everyday comments, in healthcare, in the media, and in the workplace - and it causes real harm..*

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN REAL LIFE

Comments from people close to us

"You'd be so pretty if you just lost a bit of weight." "Are you sure you should be eating that?"
These comments - even when well-intentioned - send the message that your body needs to be fixed.

In healthcare settings

Being told to lose weight before a doctor addresses an unrelated concern.
Having your symptoms dismissed or attributed to your size. Feeling judged rather than cared for.

In media and advertising

Images that only celebrate one type of body. Weight-loss ads framed as health or happiness. The message that smaller always means better - healthier, more disciplined, more worthy.

 Weight stigma is not a personal problem. It is a **social and systemic issue** - one that affects how we see ourselves, how we move through the world, and the care we receive.
Naming it matters.

"You are not the problem. The stigma is."

Recognising microaggressions.

Microaggressions are small, often unintentional comments or behaviours that communicate negative messages about someone's body. They are easy to dismiss - but they accumulate.

WHAT IS A MICROAGGRESSION?

*A microaggression is a **brief, everyday exchange** that sends a denigrating message to someone about their **body, identity, or appearance**. Each one may seem small. Together, they send a loud message: **your body is not acceptable**.*

COMMON EXAMPLES - DO ANY OF THESE SOUND FAMILIAR?



"You look so good - have you lost weight?"

Framing weight loss as an obvious compliment implies that being bigger was something to be corrected. It ties appearance to worth, often without realising it.



"Should you really be eating that?"

Policing someone's food choices - even casually - communicates that their body and choices need to be monitored and approved by others.



"You're brave for wearing that."

Framing someone's clothing choice as an act of courage implies that their body is something to be hidden or ashamed of - the opposite of a compliment.



The person saying it often means no harm. That doesn't make it harmless. **Impact matters more than intention**. Naming what happened - to yourself or to others - is a valid and important response.

"Death by a thousand cuts is still death."

Self-compassion is not **weakness**.

Many of us were taught that being hard on ourselves is how we improve. Self-compassion offers a different path - one that actually works better, and feels a great deal kinder.

WHAT IS SELF-COMPASSION?

*Self-compassion means **treating yourself with the same kindness you would offer a good friend** - especially when you are struggling, failing, or feeling bad about your body. It is not about pretending everything is fine. It is about not making it worse.*

THREE THINGS SELF-COMPASSION ACTUALLY MEANS



Kindness over self-criticism

When something hard happens, you speak to yourself gently rather than harshly. Not "I'm disgusting" but "I'm having a hard time with this right now."



Common humanity over isolation

Remembering that struggling with your body image is a human experience - not a personal failing. Many people feel this way. You are not alone in it.



Mindfulness over over-identification

Noticing difficult feelings without becoming them. "I am noticing I feel ashamed of my body right now" - rather than "I am shameful."



Research consistently shows that **self-compassion builds resilience** - it does not make us complacent. Being kinder to yourself is not giving up. It is how you keep going.

"Talk to yourself like someone you love."

Diet culture and **how it shapes us.**

Diet culture is so normal that it can be hard to see.
Naming it is the first step to stepping outside it.

WHAT IS DIET CULTURE?

*Diet culture is a **set of beliefs** that treats thinness as health, ranks foods as good or bad, and frames the body as a project to fix. It is not one diet. It is the water we swim in, and most of us absorbed it long before we could question it.*

HOW IT SHOWS UP IN EVERYDAY LIFE



Food becomes good or bad

Eating is described in moral terms. You are "so good" for a salad or "so bad" for cake. Food has no morality, but diet culture teaches us to feel virtue or guilt at the table.



Thinness is sold as health

Smaller bodies are treated as proof of discipline, health, and worth. This ignores that health is shaped by genetics, access, stress, and far more than size alone.



The body becomes a project

There is always a next goal: a cleanse, a reset, a target for summer. Diet culture profits when you believe your body is never quite finished.



Diet culture is an **industry, not a fact**. You are allowed to question it, to opt out of it, and to define health and wellbeing on your own terms.

"You were never the problem. The culture was."

Supporting a friend through body shaming.

When someone you care about is hurting, it is hard to know what to say.
Good support is simpler than it feels.

WHAT GOOD SUPPORT ACTUALLY IS

*Supporting a friend through body shaming means helping them feel **heard and less alone**, without trying to fix their body or their feelings. The goal is not to make the hurt disappear. It is to make sure they **do not carry it by themselves**.*

THREE THINGS THAT GENUINELY HELP



Listen before you fix

The instinct is to reassure fast: "you look great, ignore them." Slow down. Let them say how it felt first. Being heard often helps more than being corrected.



Don't pile on the body talk

Avoid responding with appearance talk of any kind, even kind appearance talk. "But you're so pretty" keeps the focus on looks. Move it to how they feel instead.



Follow their lead

Ask what they need rather than deciding for them. Some want advice, some want company, some want distraction. Let them set the direction.



You do not need the perfect words. **Showing up, staying, and listening** is the support that people remember.

"You were never the problem. The culture was."

Setting boundaries around your body.

A boundary is not a wall or a punishment.
It is simply a clear line that protects your wellbeing.

WHAT A BOUNDARY ACTUALLY IS

*A boundary is **information about you**: what you are okay with and what you are not. It is not a demand that others change who they are. It is a clear statement of **what you need to feel respected**, and you are allowed to have one.*

THREE KINDS OF BODY BOUNDARY



A topic boundary

You decide some subjects are off the table. Diets, weight, and who has "lost" or "gained" do not have to be open for discussion just because someone raises them.



A comment boundary

You can ask people not to comment on your body at all, positive or negative. "Please don't talk about my weight" is a complete and reasonable request.



A contact boundary

You can step away. Leaving a conversation, muting an account, or ending a call is a valid boundary when words alone are not respected.



A boundary can be **calm, short, and kind**. You do not need to argue for it, win a debate, or make everyone agree. You only need to state

"No is a complete sentence."

Assertive communication and **your voice**.

Being assertive is not about being loud or difficult.
It is about being clear, and treating yourself as worth hearing.

WHAT ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION IS

Assertive communication is the **middle path**. It means saying what you think, need, or feel clearly and with respect, without shrinking yourself (passive) or overpowering others (aggressive). It treats **your voice and theirs** as equally valid.

THREE MOVES THAT MAKE IT WORK



Say the thing plainly

Name what you mean without softening it into nothing. "Please don't comment on my body" is clearer, and kinder to everyone, than hoping the hint is taken.



Speak from your own experience

Describe how something lands for you rather than accusing. "I feel uncomfortable when..." is harder to argue with than "you always.." and keeps the door open.



Hold your point calmly

You can repeat yourself without raising your voice or over-explaining. A steady "I've said what I need" is enough. You do not have to win the exchange.



Being assertive is **not the same as being rude**. You can be warm, calm, and completely clear at the same time. Respect and honesty belong together.

"Your voice is not too much. It is exactly enough."

Body diversity and what health really is.

Bodies are meant to be different.
Understanding that is a relief, and it is also simply accurate.

WHAT BODY DIVERSITY MEANS

*Body diversity is the simple fact that human bodies **naturally come in many shapes, sizes, and weights**. This is not a failure of willpower or a problem to correct. It is **normal human variation**, the same as height, skin tone, or shoe size.*

WHAT THE EVIDENCE ACTUALLY SHOWS



Bodies are built to differ

Genetics, hormones, environment, and life history all shape your body. Two people can live almost identically and still have very different bodies. That is expected, not a fault.



Weight is a weak measure of health

Weight tells you very little on its own. Sleep, stress, movement, food security, income, and access to care shape health far more, and a number on a scale captures none of them.



Health is not a body type

People are healthy and unhealthy at every size. Treating thinness as proof of health, or larger bodies as proof of illness, gets the science wrong and the person wrong.



Your body does not need to look a certain way to be **worthy of care and respect**. Health is something you can pursue from the body you have now.

"There is no one right way to have a body."

Where to find support.

You do not have to carry body image struggles alone.
Knowing the kinds of support that exist makes the first step smaller.

WHY SUPPORT MATTERS

*Struggling with how you feel about your body is **common**, and it is not **weakness**. Support is not only for a crisis. It is for anyone who wants to feel less alone, think more clearly, or simply **be heard by someone who gets it**.*

KINDS OF SUPPORT THAT EXIST



A trusted person

A friend, relative, or mentor who listens without judgement. Naming a struggle out loud, even once, often makes it feel more manageable. Start with whoever feels safe.



Peer and community spaces

Groups, online or in person, of people facing similar things. Being around others who understand can reduce the isolation that makes body image struggles heavier.



Professional support

Counsellors, therapists, and youth or health services offer trained, confidential help. Seeking it is a practical choice, not a last resort or a sign that things are severe.



You do not need to wait until things feel **bad enough**. If something is weighing on you, that is reason enough to reach out.

"Asking for support is a skill, not a failure."|

Speaking up as a bystander.

When you see someone else being body-shamed, what you do matters. It does not have to be dramatic to help.

WHAT BYSTANDER SUPPORT IS

*A bystander is anyone who **witnesses** a body comment aimed at someone else. Speaking up does not mean winning an argument or shaming the speaker. It means **interrupting the moment** so the person targeted does not stand in it alone.*

SMALL MOVES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Interrupt the moment

You do not need a speech. A simple "let's change the subject" or "that's not kind" breaks the flow and signals the comment is not welcome.



Shift the focus

Move attention away from the person's body. Bring up something else, ask a question, or redirect the group. This quietly ends the comment without a confrontation.



Check in afterwards

Find a private moment to ask the person if they are okay. Knowing someone noticed, and cared, can matter as much as anything said in the room.



You do not have to be confident or quick-witted to help. **Noticing, and not staying silent**, is the part that counts.

"Asking for support is a skill, not a failure."

Body liberation and why it matters.

Body liberation is the idea underneath all of these resources. It is bigger, and more hopeful, than it first sounds.

WHAT BODY LIBERATION MEANS

*Body liberation is freedom from the pressure to meet a narrow body standard, **and from the systems that profit by selling it.** It is not about loving your body every day. It is about a world where **your body is not a barrier** to being treated well.*

WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT

It is not the same as body positivity

Body positivity often asks you to feel beautiful. Body liberation asks for something bigger: that your worth and your treatment should not depend on how you look at all.

It is collective, not just personal

You cannot think your way out of bias alone. Body liberation looks at culture, media, healthcare, and policy, not only at individual mindset.

It does not require self-love

You are allowed to have hard days about your body. Liberation is not a feeling you must achieve. It is a standard for how everyone deserves to be treated

 Body liberation is not about **giving up**. It is about redirecting energy once spent fixing your body toward **living, and toward change.**

"A world that fits every body is worth working toward."