

weight bias response deck

Deck of cards with 12
common weight bias
phrases and ideas on how
to respond to them



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This deck is a part of support materials developed in the project “Body Liberation for Gender Equality”. Scan the QR code to see more from the project - Pocket Guide Against Body Shaming, My Body Kindness Journal, podcast, and much more!



BODY POLICING - APPEARANCE PRESSURE

"You'd look so much better if you lost weight."

said by: family members, friends, sometimes strangers

WHY THIS CAUSES HARM

- Ties beauty and worth to body size - implying the person is not good enough as they are.
- Reinforces the idea that thinness is a goal above health, joy, and autonomy.
- Causes lasting shame and withdrawal - even when said with good intentions.

TYPE OF BIAS

Weight stigma

Body policing

Appearance norm

Flip for how to respond

"You'd look better if you lost weight."

Choose what fits your energy and relationship. You never owe anyone an explanation.

SET A BOUNDARY

"I'd prefer you didn't comment on my body. It's not something I want to discuss."

Direct and clear. No explanation needed. Works especially for repeat situations.

NAME THE ASSUMPTION

"That comment assumes my body needs to change to be valued. I don't agree."

Challenges the belief calmly. Good when you have energy for a conversation.

SOFT EXIT

"Actually, I feel fine about my body. Let's talk about something else."

Protects your peace. No need to convince anyone - just redirect and move on.

Remember: You are not responsible for educating everyone. Choose the response that protects you first.

WEIGHT STIGMA - CONCERN TROLLING

"I'm just worried about your health, that's all."

said by: family, friends, sometimes doctors

WHY THIS CAUSES HARM

- Uses concern as a cover for body commentary - health is a pretext, not the real message.
- Implies the person cannot be trusted to manage their own body and health.
- Causes shame and defensiveness - even from people who genuinely care.

TYPE OF BIAS

Weight stigma

Concern trolling

Body policing

Flip for how to respond

"I'm just worried about your health."

You can acknowledge their concern without accepting the assumption behind it.

REDIRECT

"I appreciate you care. My health is something I manage with my doctor."

Closes the conversation without dismissing them. Works well with family.

NAME IT GENTLY

"When you comment on my body, even with good intentions, it doesn't feel supportive."

Honest and calm. Opens space for a real conversation if they're willing.

SIMPLE EXIT

"I'm fine, thanks. Let's talk about something else."

When you don't have the energy. Short, polite, final.

Remember: You don't need to justify your body or your health choices to anyone.

MICROAGGRESSION - BACKHANDED COMPLIMENT

"You look amazing - have you lost weight?"

said by: friends, colleagues, acquaintances

WHY THIS CAUSES HARM

- Treats weight loss as an obvious positive - implying that being bigger was a problem to solve.
- Ties how someone looks to their worth, even when framed as kindness.
- Makes the person feel they were less acceptable before - and may be again.

TYPE OF BIAS

Microaggression

Weight bias

Backhanded compliment

Flip for how to respond

"You look amazing - have you lost weight?"

You can acknowledge the goodwill without accepting the assumption underneath it.

GENTLE REFRAME

"Thanks - I actually felt great before too."

Light and confident. Signals that your value didn't change with your weight.

NAME IT

"I notice compliments about my body often come with a weight comment attached."

Thoughtful and direct. Good for someone you trust and want to have a real conversation with.

REDIRECT

"Thanks! How are you doing?"

When you don't have the energy. Accept the surface kindness, move on.

Remember: You were worthy before. You are worthy now. That hasn't changed.

SELF-CRITICISM - INNER VOICE

"I look disgusting. I need to change."

the voice we direct at ourselves

WHY THIS INNER VOICE CAUSES HARM

- Harsh self-talk increases shame and anxiety - it doesn't motivate change, it depletes us.
- We internalise messages from diet culture, media, and others - and repeat them as if they are true.
- Over time, this voice erodes confidence and shrinks what we allow ourselves to do and enjoy.

WHAT THIS REFLECTS

Internalised stigma

Diet culture

Self-criticism

Flip for how to respond

"I look disgusting. I need to change."

You can interrupt this voice. You don't have to believe everything it says.

SOFTEN IT

"I'm having a hard time with how I feel about my body right now."

Acknowledges the struggle without compounding it. Small but powerful shift.

WIDEN THE LENS

"Many people feel this way. This is not a personal failing - it is a human experience."

Reduces the isolation that makes shame worse.

ASK THE FRIEND QUESTION

"Would I say this to someone I love? What would I say to them instead?"

Activates the kinder part of you. Then turn that voice on yourself.

Remember: Self-compassion is not weakness. It is the foundation for real, lasting change.

DIET CULTURE - MORALISING FOOD

"I'm being so bad today."

said by: ourselves, friends, often without thinking

WHY THIS CAUSES HARM

- Turns eating into a moral test, where some food makes you "good" and some makes you "bad".
- Ties your sense of worth to restriction, so a normal meal can trigger guilt.
- Spreads easily. Said out loud, it teaches everyone listening to judge their own plates.

TYPE OF BIAS

Diet culture

Food moralising

Internalised bias

Flip for how to respond

"I'm being so bad today."

Food is not a moral category. You can step out of that frame - for yourself and the people around you.

DROP THE MORALITY

"I don't really think of food as good or bad anymore. I'm just eating."

Removes the moral frame without a lecture. Models a calmer way to talk about food.

REDIRECT WITH WARMTH

"You're not bad. You're just having lunch. Let's enjoy it."

Gently interrupts the script for a friend, and offers a kinder one in its place.

NAME IT FOR YOURSELF

"That's diet culture talking, not me. I don't owe anyone guilt for eating."

A private reframe. Useful when the voice is your own.

Remember: Food keeps you alive and brings you joy. Neither of those things is something to apologise for.

WELL-MEANING - UNHELPFUL SUPPORT

"Just ignore them, you look fine!"

said by: friends and family who genuinely care

WHY THIS CAN STILL HURT

- "Just ignore it" tells the person their hurt is not worth taking seriously.
- Reassuring their looks keeps the conversation about appearance - the very thing that hurt.
- It closes the door fast, when what they often need is for the door to stay open.

TYPE OF BIAS

Well-meaning

Minimising

Appearance focus

Flip for how to respond

"Just ignore them, you look fine!"

A friend in this moment needs to feel heard, not corrected. These responses keep the focus on them.

OPEN THE DOOR

"That sounds really hard. Do you want to talk about it?"

Invites them to share without pushing. Signals you can handle whatever they say.

VALIDATE THE FEELING

"It makes sense that this got to you. It would get to me too."

Tells them their reaction is normal. Removes the pressure to "just be fine".

OFFER, DON'T DECIDE

"I'm here. Do you want advice, or do you just want me to listen?"

Hands them the choice. Lets them get the kind of support they actually want.

Remember: You will not always know the right thing to say. Staying present is the right thing to do.

INTRUSIVE COMMENT - BODY POLICING

"Have you gained weight?"

said by: relatives, often at family gatherings

WHY THIS CAUSES HARM

- Treats your body as public property, open for comment without your consent.
- Frames a change in weight as a problem to explain, rather than a normal part of being alive.
- Repeated often, it teaches you to brace for judgement every time you are seen.

TYPE OF BIAS

Body policing

Intrusive comment

Boundary needed

Flip for how to respond

"Have you gained weight?"

You do not have to answer a question about your body. These responses set a clear line, calmly.

STATE THE BOUNDARY

"I'd rather not talk about my body. Let's catch up on something else."

Direct and brief. No explanation needed. Works well for repeat situations.

NAME AND REDIRECT

"Comments on my weight don't feel good. Tell me what's new with you."

Names the impact, then moves the conversation on. Good with people you want to keep close.

STEP AWAY

"I'm going to get a drink. We can talk later."

Ends the exchange without a confrontation. A boundary you can act on, not just speak.

Remember: You do not owe anyone access to your body as a topic. A boundary is enough on its own.

SUBTLE PRESSURE - EASY TO ABSORB

"You'd be perfect if you toned up a bit."

said by: partners, friends, framed as helpful

WHY STAYING SILENT COSTS YOU

- A comment like this is easy to absorb in silence, where it quietly becomes a belief.
- Saying nothing can read as agreement, and invites more of the same over time.
- Each unanswered comment makes the next one feel more normal, and harder to name.

TYPE OF BIAS

Subtle pressure

Conditional approval

Speak up

Flip for how to respond

"You'd be perfect if you toned up a bit."

You do not have to accept this in silence. These responses are clear and steady, not aggressive.

NAME IT PLAINLY

"I'm not looking to change my body. I'd like that to be respected."

States your position without apology. Clear, calm, and hard to misread.

SPEAK FROM YOURSELF

"When my body is framed as a project, it doesn't feel good to me."

Describes your experience rather than accusing. Keeps the conversation open.

HOLD THE LINE

"I've said how I feel about this. I'd like to leave it there."

Repeats your point without escalating. You do not have to keep defending it.

Remember: Speaking up is not aggression. It is treating your own comfort as something that counts.

HEALTH AS PRETEXT - SIZE BIAS

"You'd be so much healthier if you lost weight."

said by: relatives, acquaintances, sometimes professionals

WHY THIS CAUSES HARM

- Treats weight as the same thing as health, when the evidence shows it is a weak stand-in.
- Assumes the speaker knows your health from your appearance, which they cannot.
- Frames an unproven claim as care, making it harder to question or push back on.

TYPE OF BIAS

Size bias

Health pretext

Body policing

Flip for how to respond

"You'd be so much healthier if you lost weight."

Your health is yours to manage. These responses set that line calmly.

RETURN IT TO FACT

"Health and weight aren't the same thing. I'd rather not assume one from the other."

Corrects the premise plainly. Useful when the comment is framed as common sense.

KEEP IT WITH YOU

"My health is something I look after with people I trust. I'm good, thanks."

Closes the topic without a debate. Works well with people who mean well.

NAME THE PATTERN

"Comments about my weight don't actually support my health. They just don't feel good."

Honest and calm. Opens space for a real conversation if the other person is willing.

Remember: You do not have to prove your health to anyone. Your body deserves care exactly as it is.

INTERNAL BARRIER - INNER VOICE

"It's not bad enough to ask for help."

the voice that talks us out of reaching out

WHY THIS INNER VOICE CAUSES HARM

- Sets an invisible bar for "bad enough" that almost nothing ever clears.
- Treats support as something to be earned through suffering, rather than simply used.
- Keeps struggles private, where they tend to grow heavier instead of lighter.

TYPE OF BIAS

Internal barrier

Minimising

Self-doubt

Flip for how to respond

"It's not bad enough to ask for help."

You do not have to qualify for support by suffering enough. These responses interrupt that voice.

LOWER THE BAR

"Support isn't only for emergencies. Wanting it is reason enough."

Removes the "bad enough" test. A reframe to come back to when the voice returns.

ASK FOR LISTENING

"I don't need this fixed. I'd just like to talk it through with someone."

Names a smaller, clearer ask. Lowers the stakes of reaching out for the first time.

TREAT IT AS NORMAL

"Plenty of people get support for this. I can be one of them."

Frames help as ordinary, not exceptional. Counters the sense of being a special case.

Remember: You do not need permission, or a serious enough reason, to ask for support. Wanting it is enough.

GROUP DYNAMIC - SHAMING A THIRD PERSON

"Did you see how much she was eating?"

said to you, about someone who is not there

WHY THIS CAUSES HARM

- Invites you to join in policing someone else's body, often as a kind of bonding.
- Spreads the idea that other people's eating is open for comment and judgement.
- Met with silence or a laugh, it makes the next comment, and the next, feel normal.

TYPE OF BIAS

Group dynamic

Body policing

Bystander moment

Flip for how to respond

"Did you see how much she was eating?"

You can decline to join in without a confrontation. These responses interrupt the moment, calmly.

DECLINE TO JOIN

"I don't really like talking about what other people eat."

Opts out plainly without attacking. Quietly signals the comment found no audience.

SHIFT THE FOCUS

"She seems great to me. Anyway, did you catch the news today?"

Closes the topic and moves on. Useful in a group, when you want to avoid a scene.

NAME IT GENTLY

"It feels a bit unfair to talk about her when she's not here."

Names what is happening, calmly. Good with people who would respond to a nudge.

Remember: Choosing not to join in is already support. You do not need a perfect line to refuse.

MISCONCEPTION - DISMISSING THE IDEA

"Body liberation just means giving up on yourself."

said by: people who misunderstand the idea

WHY THIS MISSES THE POINT

- Assumes constant body work is the only form of self-respect, which is diet culture talking.
- Frames freedom from body pressure as laziness, rather than as a redirected use of energy.
- Dismisses a collective idea as a personal excuse, so the real argument is never heard.

TYPE OF BIAS

Misconception

Diet culture

Dismissal

Flip for how to respond

"Body liberation just means giving up on yourself."

Body liberation is not giving up. These responses explain the idea calmly, without a fight.

REFRAME IT

"It's not giving up. It's spending my energy on living instead of shrinking."

States the actual point in one line. Clear, and hard to argue with.

SEPARATE THE TWO

"Caring for myself and meeting a body standard aren't the same thing."

Untangles the assumption underneath the comment. Good for a real conversation.

KEEP IT LIGHT

"It's a bigger idea than that. Worth a proper chat sometime, not a one-liner."

Declines the dismissal without escalating. Leaves the door open for later.

Remember: Body liberation is not the end of effort. It is effort, pointed at living rather than fixing.