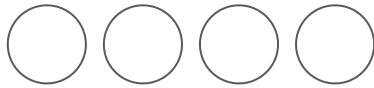


RAISING KIDS BETTER PARENTING

I Refuse to Let My Body Image Issues Rub Off On My Baby Girl

My mother, grandmother, and I have all struggled to love our bodies. Having a daughter made me realize I need to break the cycle.

By **Jamie Friedlander Serrano** | Published on August 18, 2021



I'm at my 8-month-old daughter's first swimming lesson, and although I've looked forward to this day for weeks, I can't help but feel self-conscious. I'm acutely aware of my engorged nursing breasts and the way my thighs jiggle as I walk. I've never been comfortable in a swimsuit, and postpartum body changes have only magnified my insecurity.

As we enter the pool, a smile creeps across my daughter Penny's face. She traces her fingers along the surface of the water and excitedly kicks her feet. When I give her a gentle toss in the air, she giggles and beams with happiness. It's one of the best moments we've shared since she's been born.

Later that evening while nursing Penny, I thought about the beautiful, bright-eyed baby girl in my arms. I pictured her as a teenager who felt the way I did in a swimsuit. My stomach turned. I didn't want her to ever feel anything less than comfort and confidence in her own skin.

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That night, I made myself two promises:

1. I would never let my body image issues prevent me from enjoying life with Penny.
2. I would never let Penny see my deeply held insecurities about my appearance. Penny would grow up with a mother who loved her body and who taught her to do the same.

My mother has always been deeply critical of her figure. As a young girl, I recall her mentioning how displeased she was with her weight on a daily basis. To this day, I can't remember ever thinking she was confident in her body—let alone content. Though not as self-critical, my grandmother was also fixated on her weight, going so far as to weigh her 4-foot-9-inch frame

I grew up with the mindset that unless I was thin and toned, my body was not worth loving. This perspective led to myriad unhealthy behaviors. I spent years compulsively weighing myself. If the number on the scale reached an arbitrary threshold I set for myself, my entire day would be ruined. For a while, I counted calories obsessively. Whenever I got close to 1,600, I'd stop eating for the day—even if I was still hungry. In the months leading up to my wedding, I restricted myself to 1,200 calories per day. My stomach constantly growled, but I recall thinking at the time, *I've never fainted from being hungry before, so what's the worst that could happen?*

My struggle extends beyond just my weight. I often worry about the small patches of vitiligo under my eyes or my super curly hair being frizzy. I've considered getting breast reduction surgery in the past, and now that I'm nursing, my embarrassment about my breast size has only intensified.

Looking back, there are so many moments I couldn't fully enjoy because I was self-conscious about one thing or another. I don't want Penny to go through life worrying about her hair being frizzy or her stomach sticking out when she could instead be living joyfully in the present.

RELATED: [How to Raise Your Kid in a Body Positive Way](https://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/i-refuse-to-let-my-body-image-issues-rub-off-on-my-baby-girl/)

Whether Penny inherits my wide hips or my husband's super long legs, I will teach her that her body is beautiful and she should love it because it's the only one she has. If she gets my unruly curls, I'll strive to make sure she loves how unique they are instead of hating their tendency toward dryness and frizz. If she develops acne or vitiligo like I have, I will help her see that those things don't define her self-worth.

Although I'm in a better place now—I no longer count calories or obsessively weigh myself—my insecurity is still there. I'm close to my pre-pregnancy weight, not because of any unhealthy behaviors, but rather because of the nutritious diet and calorie burn that tends to accompany breastfeeding. However, I'm still learning to embrace all the ways my body is different now

Even though I'm still a work in progress, I want Penny to think her mother loves her body. So when my body image issues inevitably creep in, I will keep them to myself. And if Penny ever does feel self-conscious about her appearance despite my efforts, I'll let her know that's OK. I'll offer a listening ear and the knowledge that she's not alone.

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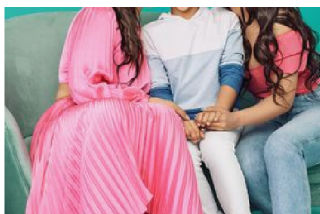
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