

Social media has its benefits for connecting with friends, sharing experiences and widening their understanding of broader issues beyond their local community. The challenge with connecting and sharing experiences via social media is that these shared experiences are often via images. Wanting to fit in and caring about their physical appearance is a perfectly normal part of adolescence. However, with the easy access of image changing software and filters, this physical appearance is often not the reality, further increasing the pressure for young people to gain or portray unreal perceptions.



What parents need to know about SOCIAL PRESSURES LINKED TO 'APPEARANCE'



ONLINE APPEARANCE AND MENTAL HEALTH

The opportunity to change physical appearance through social media apps is creating a high level of perfectionism for children to portray themselves faultless and compare themselves to images which are sometimes unreal. This can lead to anxiety, depression and poor self-image and an overall sense of never feeling good enough. Having poor self-image can affect the way that your child interacts with others and how we care for ourselves.

AIRBRUSHING

Refers to the retouching done to an image that changes the reality of the photo. It may include removing people, objects, altering body shapes or erasing blemishes like acne or scars. The digital technology to enable airbrushing is now widely and easily available for desktop computers and social media apps. It is sometimes known as 'Photoshop'.



FILTERS

Filters applied to manipulate a photograph are another way of creating a delusion of what is real. Software within social media apps reconfigure your face and skin to look more aesthetically pleasing. As innocent and fun as these filters may seem, they are sending a message that we are more attractive when our features are modified.



APPS WHICH CHANGE APPEARANCE

These relate to free downloadable apps or options within social media apps which create a fun and easy way to alter your appearance. They are designed to be fun and can become addictive because once an altered image is used, it is very difficult to revert back to an unaltered version of themselves.



MULTIPLE PHOTOS FOR THE PERFECT IMAGE

Taking multiple shots to capture the perfect image to put onto social media is another way of disguising reality. Creating an image which receives approval from peers through multiple comments and likes exacerbates the desire for a perfect picture and the approval for continuing to achieve the perfect image.



Safety Tips For Parents

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE TALKING TO YOUR CHILD

- Do most of their social media photos have a filter/image changing app on them?
- Do they often talk about wanting to gain comments and 'likes'?
- How often do they talk about their physical image in a negative way?
- Are they excessively anxious about their physical appearance, to the point it impacts on their every day life?

If you have answered yes to most of these questions, then it would be a good idea to have a discussion about their use of image altering app's.

DON'T GO COLD TURKEY

Talk with your child about taking one unfiltered image of themselves and sharing it with family first and then posting on social media. Perhaps ask other members of the family to send or post on social media unaltered pictures of themselves.



BE COMPLIMENTARY

Whilst improving body image starts with the child's image of themselves, complimenting them daily on their personality and qualities will provide external, positive encouragement about themselves, away from just their physical appearance.



DAILY APPRECIATION

When we have the sense that we are not good enough, we can feel like we are always falling short. You and your child together might want to create a gratitude journal, board with post-it's or wipe board where you write down things that you are grateful for or appreciate. This could range from the weather to a kind deed or to a piece of work that went well.

CHANGE THE STORY

We all have a narrative or a story we've created about ourselves that shapes our core self-image. Sometimes automatic negative thoughts like 'you're fat' or 'you're ugly' can be repeated in your mind so often that you start to believe they are true. These thoughts are learned, which means they can be unlearned. You can start with helping your child reframe the story into a more positive assertion or story. This will link to complementing and daily appreciation.



WHEN TO GET HELP

If your child becomes overly despondent, withdrawn or there is a change in behaviour over a prolonged period of time, they may need some professional support to help them. <https://www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists> <https://www.themix.org.uk/> is good organisation as a source of support if your child wants to reach out for support themselves



Meet our expert

Anna Bateman is passionate about placing prevention at the heart of every school, integrating mental wellbeing within the curriculum, school culture and systems. She is also a member of the advisory group for the Department of Education, advising them on their mental health green paper.

