

# JCCCA

## Parent Page

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JCCCA  
Jefferson County Child Care Assn.  
P.O. Box 280853  
Lakewood, Colorado 80228  
[www.jeffcochildcare.org](http://www.jeffcochildcare.org)

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### Does Your Daughter Have a Positive Body Image?

Ten-year-old Melissa looks at her image in the mirror and doesn't like what she sees. Sound unusual? Not according to research that suggests girls as young as age 9 report dissatisfaction with their bodies.

Body image is based on perception, which may often be distorted. Because perception is subjective, the things that affect body image are individualistic. Dream Big, the Big Ten Conference's program to promote young girls' participation in sports, consulted with to help parents and others understand how they can reinforce a positive body image in girls.

Girls tend to struggle with body image in far greater numbers than boys. Studies show that boys don't focus as much on their body shape and size as do girls.

Children often mimic their parents' beliefs and prejudices. "Anything, such as a comment a parent makes, can set a child in the wrong direction," says Claudia Rapp, Psy.D., with the Madison Center for Children. That's why parents need to

be aware of what they say, and how they react to their own and others' body shape and size.

Rappl recommends a positive approach when talking with your daughter. "Anything you focus on or make a big deal about becomes even bigger. Focus on things that have nothing to do with her physical appearance, such as character, personality and talents. Focusing on the inner qualities is more helpful," said Rappl.



A girl's peers may affect her perception of body image. This is especially true as she reaches adolescence and peer groups become more important.

The media continue to be a major influence on body image. Television shows, magazines and advertisers often show thin and pretty actresses and models. How much impact the media have on perception may be debatable; however, there appears to be some influence. The book "Girl Power in the Mirror" recommends that girls take a reality test when viewing fashion magazines or TV

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shows that portray these beautiful and thin women. For example, girls should realize models have had professional assistance to look as good as they do. Does their beauty make them happier and healthier? Don't let girls compare themselves to models and TV stars, because what they see isn't reality.

Some attention to body size and shape is part of the normal growing process. As children reach adolescence, their bodies change, and children, especially girls, become more aware of how they look. Parents and teachers should realize some of these feelings are normal. But when a girl doesn't want to participate in sports because she is unhappy with the way she looks in the uniform, this may signal a problem. Rappl suggests that avoidance and isolation are red flags of a poor body image. At that point, the child may need outside counsel.

Being in a positive and healthy relationship with someone helps girls maintain positive body images. The ability to talk with someone and feel accepted by that person, whether it's a parent, teacher or coach, can heal a child and reinforce a strong body image. Self-esteem and self-control are key components to a healthy body image. For the most part, if a girl displays confidence and personal control, the likelihood of a positive body image is greater.

For more information, check out these sites, [www.bodypositive.com](http://www.bodypositive.com), [www.girlsinc.org](http://www.girlsinc.org), [www.naafa.org](http://www.naafa.org). *Buzzle.com March 2007.*

## Little Bowlegs

My toddler is bowlegged -- is something wrong with his legs?

**By Dr. Claire McCarthy**

### **Q My toddler is clearly bowlegged. Is something wrong?**

**A** Most toddlers look at least a little bowlegged, which is totally normal. Babies are born with curved legs because the angle between the bones helped them fold up compactly in the womb. Between 18 months and 3 years, children's legs usually straighten out on their own. That said, bowlegged kids should be checked out by their doctor just to be sure they don't have a serious condition, such as Blount's disease (a problem with the tibia, one of the bones in the shin) or rickets (a disease caused by vitamin D deficiency, which can make bones weak). You should also call the doctor if your child seems to be getting more bowlegged or if he seems to be in pain when he walks. *Parenting, March 2007*

## Learning Basic Social Skills

### How to encourage your toddler to be nice

By Linda Formichelli

Though your toddler mostly seems interested in what you can do for her — like refilling her sippy cup right this second — a recent study showed that kids as young as 18 months do recognize and care about other people. To encourage her:

Be proud of your own selflessness. Talk about your good deeds so your child understands what you're doing and why. For instance, explain to her, "I'm going to let this man go ahead of us in line because he's in a rush and we aren't."

Nurture your child's nice instincts. When she does something kind for another person, give her a great big thanks. A little recognition will encourage her to keep it up, and eventually she'll enjoy doing good

without expecting anything in return.

Let it go. It's okay if she doesn't want to share her favorite toy with a new child at the playground. No toddler can be selfless all the time, and in some situations, pushing her will only make her push back harder. *Parenting, March 2007*

## That First Crush

### How to help your tween navigate puppy love

By Ylonda Gault Caviness

The giddy feeling kids get around age 8 or so — for anyone from a peer to a pop star — is actually an important milestone: It shows they're learning about types of love that go beyond the emotions they have for family, says Glenn Joseph Kashurba, M.D., a Somerset, PA-based adolescent psychiatrist. They may seem intense, but crushes are usually innocent and fleeting. To help your child (and you) navigate puppy love:

**Stay cool.** Let her explain what "dating" and "boyfriend" mean to her. You may find that what she's thinking is less serious than what you're imagining.

**Don't badger.** Your child may not want to talk about the object of her affection, and that's okay. If she does share details, listen without lecturing. She may not confide in you again if you criticize her or poke fun!

**Set limits on dates.** You might say, "It's great that you and Jimmy get along, but you're too young to hang out alone. Why don't I take a group of you to the movies?"

**Try a little empathy.** Share a story about crushes you had and tell her that whatever happens, from first date to heartache, she'll live to tell the tale. *Parenting, February 2007*