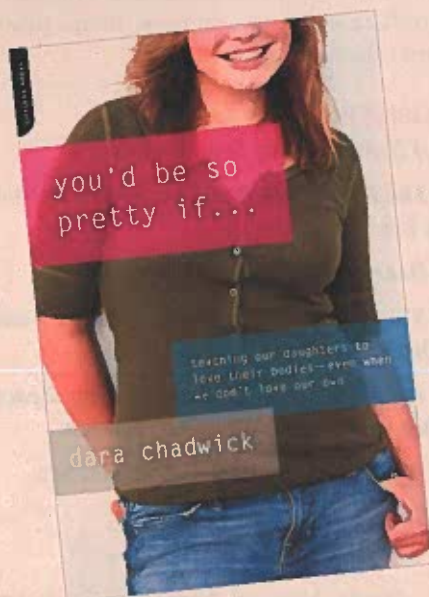


Your Body and Your Daughter



BY KRISTEN DE DEYN KIRK

Dara Chadwick grew up with a wonderful, loving mother who couldn't have been more supportive, but her mom didn't always show herself the same degree of love. Talking about her own body, she'd make herself the butt of jokes. Even though Dara thought her mother was beautiful, she started to question herself when people commented that she looked just like her mom: If her mom didn't like her own looks, and people thought Dara looked like her, how could she be OK? Later, when Dara had her own daughter, who's now a teenager, she wondered if she was always sending healthy messages as well. Her concern grew when she became *Shape's* 2007 weight-loss diary columnist. She wanted to be sure that her daughter, Faith, understood that her efforts were about being healthy, not stick thin nor perfect. Later, Dara talked with mothers, daughters and body image experts to write *You'd Be So Pretty If...: Teaching our daughters to love their bodies—even when we don't love our own* (Da Capo Press, \$15.95), a practical guide for mothers who want to set a positive example and raise confident, resilient daughters who love themselves. Dara recently talked with Tidewater Parent:

Tidewater Parent: You were excited to become *Shape's* Weight-Loss Diary columnist in 2007, but also concerned that your efforts to lose weight might confuse your daughter. Why?

Dara Chadwick: She was 11 at the time and I knew that the "tween" years can be a critical time for girls. Their own bodies are starting to change, and they're also starting to pay more attention to what's important to grown-up women and older girls. I was concerned that if she heard me talking about calories and pounds – and focusing so much on the scale – that it might make her think that that's what she should focus on, too. I didn't want her to think that calories and pounds were something she needed to be thinking about. I also wanted her to know that I took on the Shape project because I wanted to be healthier – not because I wanted to "get skinny."

TP: Girls are bombarded with opinions about the female body; they hear comments from family members, friends, enemies and the media, and sometimes those messages are negative and contradictory. (I saw a magazine cover today with pictures of a 20-something movie star who was labeled "scary thin" and below that, a fit, middle-aged TV star was ridiculed for having a tummy bulge, which I couldn't see. I wanted to take all the copies and burn them.) How can a mother possibly combat the messages a daughter receives?

DC: I think it's so important for moms to be aware of the messages their daughters are getting. Read her magazines, watch her TV shows and listen to the conversation between her and her friends when you're driving carpool. As much as we want to insulate our girls from these messages, we really can't. They're everywhere. That's why knowing what she's absorbing – and doing your best to help her filter it – is the best thing you can do. In other words, when she sees a retouched model, talk with her about what she's seeing, how it's been changed and what it's selling. In my book, I offer advice on teaching girls how to look critically at media images. As for skinny celebrities, help her understand the pressures

that celebrity might be under to look that way.

TP: A "dinner roll incident" opened your eyes and improved your relationship with your daughter and food. Can you explain what happened?

DC: We were at a holiday family dinner and my daughter reached for a third dinner roll. I snapped at her, "Do you really need that roll?" As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I regretted them. She looked shocked and hurt, and I vowed I'd never do that again. I can remember being told that I'd "had enough" as a kid and there's no denying the message that sends: You need to watch what you're eating. I didn't want to make my daughter think she had a weight problem – or even needed to be concerned about having a weight problem someday – when she clearly didn't. Now, I try to guide both of my kids toward healthy food choices, but I trust them to know when they're hungry and when they're not.

TP: Bathing suit shopping is always a touchy subject, but you handled it beautifully with your daughter. Can you share your approach with our readers?

DC: Thanks for saying that! My daughter needed a new bathing suit and was upset because the one she'd ordered from a catalog didn't fit the way she wanted it to. So I took her to a store and I said, "Let's just grab any suit in your size that you like the color of and try it on." She tried on about 12 suits and found one that she loved. It looked great on her! But it was a suit that she wouldn't have given a second glance to on the hanger, and she was surprised how much she liked the way it looked on her body. Now, our attitude is, "Just try it on!"

TP: You talk about girls trying to overcome bullying, especially when someone says something mean about their bodies, and encourage them to find the "why." Can you explain this and how a mother can help?

DC: I talked to quite a few experts in the

book and one of them was a peer relations expert. He emphasized how important it is that girls not "internalize" criticism; in other words, just because somebody says something about you doesn't mean it's true. There's lots of advice in the book for helping girls deal with bullying and criticism, including trying to figure out why the person might be saying mean things. Is she jealous of your daughter? Is your daughter getting attention from a boy the other girl likes or from a favorite teacher? Helping your daughter see that criticism is always about the person doing the criticizing and not about her goes a long way toward keeping her from absorbing someone else's negative comments and accepting them as true.

TP: Another idea you discuss is "act as if," and how it helped you at least once when you were a teenager. How can women do this and how can they teach their daughters to also?

DC: "Act as if" can be a life-changing concept. I've experienced it myself - as a teenager, I remember feeling bad about my body before a dance and really not wanting to go. I decided to "act as if" I looked and felt great, and it totally changed my experience that night. I had a great time and didn't spend the night ruminating about how "bad" I looked. Other women I talked to for the book have had similar experiences. It's a great way to help your daughter realize that she can choose to see herself in a different way. "Act as if" can be a powerful tool in changing the image you have of yourself.

TP: How does a mother know that she's been successful in helping her daughter have a good body image? How did you know that you had accomplished your goal with your daughter?

DC: I think it's important for both moms and daughters to realize that we're all works in progress. The body I have today isn't the body I'll have in five years. What I strive for isn't perfection, it's to be the best and healthiest version of myself. That's what having a good body image is, for me. It's being content with being me. I'm trying to help my daughter see that she can be the best and healthiest version of herself by taking good care of her body with healthy choices and speaking kindly about herself (and others). **P**

Kristen De Deyn Kirk is a longtime Tidewater Parent contributor and editor of www.mytidewatermoms.com.

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