BODY IMAGE

Body image refers to a person's feelings, beliefs, and perceptions of their own body. Every single one of us has a body image. We cannot avoid having feelings about how we look; it is part of human nature. We are influenced by how we imagine others might see us. However people's overall body image can range from extremely negative to very positive.

What is Negative Body Image?

- Negative body image refers to an unrealistic view of how someone sees their body. Like eating disorders, it is currently seen most commonly in women, but many men also suffer from the disorder. A person begins forming their perceptions of their body's attractiveness, acceptability and functionality in early childhood. Body image continues to form as the person ages. The formation of body image can be both conscious or unconscious, and develops from many sources i.e. feedback from peers, family members, sports coaches, the media, etc.
- Statistics show that up to 80% of women and men are dissatisfied with their body, however this does not dominate their lives.
- Personality traits such as perfectionism and self criticism can also influence the development of a negative internalized image of ones body. A person who is a perfectionist may 'buy into' what the culture dictates as the 'ideal shape' i.e. thinness, and actively pursue this goal until their diet develops into a full blown eating disorder.

Relationship between a Negative Body Image and an Eating Disorder

- Body image concerns and eating disorders go hand in hand.
- Often, it is the early dissatisfaction with a young person's appearance that leads them to conclude that losing weight would enhance their appearance and make them feel better about themselves and their bodies. Thus restrictive eating (dieting) and over exercising are often the person's next behaviours. This can lead to patterns of disordered eating, weight obsession, and can develop into anorexia, bulimia, compulsive overeating or binge eating disorder, or orthorexia.
- Battling with ones body image on a daily basis is usually an integral part of an eating disorder.
- In an eating disorder body image and self image are very closely linked. The negative relationship one has with their body is also a mirror of the relationship the person has with themselves.