

INTRODUCTION

There's so much I wish I'd known as a teenager and young adult. I try to answer the questions I had back then in this book.

I think that most of us go through life carrying a metaphorical backpack on our backs. In it is a large brick of insecurity. There are also sharp stones in our backpacks that add to the weight and press into our bodies; each represents a piece of ourselves that we wish we could change. What if that big brick was tossed aside? What if we could take some of the stones out of our backpacks, and not be burdened and irritated by our noses, thighs, and unruly hair but instead accepting of them? What if we could go through life feeling lighter and more comfortable with ourselves?

My metaphorical backpack was very heavy when I was young. I've spent the last 25 years of my career driven by the desire to lighten others' loads. I hope to help young people feel less weighed down by insecurity. I want this for my own teenagers, who are on the brink of adulthood; I want this for many of the college students I teach; and I want this for the readers of this book. Throughout this book, I discuss a variety of psychological and physical health issues important during the teen years and young adulthood. The thread that connects all of these topics is *body image*. ***How can you become comfortable in your own skin?***

The longer I study body image the more I appreciate that many questions we have about how we think and feel about our bodies elude easy answers. Sometimes researchers refer to our efforts to adjust physically and mentally to our bodies as “body image work,” but I hope you can come to appreciate it as a process of self-discovery. This book can help you understand yourself better and more fully appreciate how the forces around you often conspire to detract from your development of a positive body image. With knowledge as a foundation, we can work together to reject social norms that harm mental health and make all of us feel like we are not enough as we are.

You are enough. And you will keep getting better.

