

The Parent Guide

Full of Ourselves

A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health & Leadership

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Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your daughter is participating in an exciting educational project called Full of Ourselves: Advancing Girl Power, Health and Leadership¹ (FOO). Developed by professionals at McLean Hospital and the Harvard Medical School, FOO is a program for healthy, growing girls in middle schools across the country. Our goal is to help girls stay healthy and confident—"full of themselves" in the best sense of the phrase—by teaching them positive attitudes and behaviors about eating, exercise and body image.

For girls to benefit fully from the program, your support at home is *crucial*. We encourage you to do the following:

- ♦ Make it possible for your daughter to attend all of the program sessions
- ♦ Listen and respond thoughtfully to ideas your daughter brings home
- ♦ Familiarize yourself with the information in this guide
- ♦ Visit our website at www.mclean.harvard.edu/education/youth for more info

Thank you for your interest and support.

Sincerely,

Catherine and Lisa
Program Developers

¹ This guide has been made for use with: Steiner-Adair, C. & Sjostrom, L., *Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health & Leadership* (New York: Teachers College Press, © 2005. All rights reserved.) To order copies, contact Teachers College Press at www.teacherscollegepress.com.

The FOO Units

Get on the Same Page with Your Girl

Here is a summary of many of the main ideas your daughter is exploring in the Full of Ourselves program. We suggest that you try these ideas on for size and discuss them with your daughter.

Unit 1: Full of Ourselves

When you think about a girl or woman who is "full of herself," what words come to mind? Being full of yourself, in the *best* sense of the phrase, does not mean that you know everything or feel superior to others. It does mean living powerfully and healthfully. It does mean knowing that you can make a positive difference in the world in your own unique way—without stepping on others. You see, being full of yourself doesn't mean being only for yourself. Instead, it means that you have a strong sense of who you are so you can be a more genuine friend, family member and all-around citizen.

Full of Ourselves Proclamation

A girl or woman who is full of herself, in the best sense of the phrase, might say 10 things like this:

- ✓ I know who I am
- ✓ I know that I matter
- ✓ I know what matters to me
- ✓ I pay attention to what I feel and what I need
- ✓ I make choices and decisions that are good for me
- ✓ I take good care of my body
- ✓ I stand up for what I believe in
- ✓ I let people know what I think, even when I'm angry or confused or in disagreement with everyone else
- ✓ I am a valuable friend
- ✓ I know I can make a positive difference in the world in my own unique way

Questions to consider:

- ♦ Think of a time you felt "full of yourself," in the most powerful sense of the phrase. Where were you? What were you doing? How did you feel? What gets in the way of your feeling this way more often?
- ♦ Do you support your daughter in standing up for her beliefs?

Unit 2: Claiming Our Strengths

There are many powerful women (and men) who don't buy into the pressure to "weigh" their self esteem. We can try to emulate them. It's also crucial to recognize our own strengths. Sometimes this might feel like bragging. But remember: liking yourself is not the same as being selfish; standing up for yourself is not the same as being pushy; telling the truth doesn't mean you're too loud; taking yourself seriously doesn't mean you're too intense; being in touch with your heart is not the same as being too emotional. On the contrary, as we name and appreciate the best sides of ourselves, the more capable we become of "throwing our weight around" and making a positive difference in the world.

Questions to consider:

- ♦ What would you like people to appreciate about you more often?
- ♦ Think of 3 women you admire. Which of their traits would you like to emulate?
- ♦ When have you felt particularly proud of your daughter? Be sure to tell her about this.

Unit 3: Body Politics

Weightism is a set of unfair and often unkind judgments made about a person or a group of people based solely on body size, shape and appearance. Help your daughter draw useful parallels between weightism and other forms of prejudice: judging someone solely on the basis of their looks can be as cruel as judging them solely on the basis of their skin color, sex or religion. Whether we put someone down—or up on a pedestal—just because they are heavy or thin, attractive or unattractive, it's unfair. We know nothing about who they are on the "inside": their personality, talents, interests, cares, worries, dreams, ambitions, etc.

I do my best to understand, respect and include other people, no matter what they look like. Humans come in all shapes, colors and sizes!

Questions to consider:

- ♦ Imagine that you see a woman walking down the street who is very beautiful (by society's standards). Just by looking at her, what might you assume her life is like? Would you make the same assumptions about someone who is very unattractive?
- ♦ What degree of emphasis do you put on my daughter's body size/shape? Do you ever relay the message that you will like her more if she looks differently?
- ♦ Do you ever put yourself down in front of your daughter because of your body size or shape?

Unit 4: Standing Our Ground

Research suggests that “weightist” teasing and bullying put girls at greater risk for the development of low body-esteem and eating disorders. When we witness a weightist incident, it takes courage to be an activist and speak up for what is right. Practice helps. Whenever you hear anyone being teased, excluded or put down for the way they look, don’t buy in or be non-committal. Instead, try assertive comeback: make eye contact, assume a powerful posture, and say it like you mean it. For example: “That’s mean” or “You’re wrong” or “I can’t believe you just said/did that.”

Questions to consider:

- ♦ Have you or has someone you know ever been discriminated against or hurt by comments made about body shape or size? How have you responded?
- ♦ Think of a time in your life when you stood up for yourself or for someone else who was being treated unfairly. What did you say or do? What happened as a result? If you didn’t speak up, what do you *wish* you’d said or done?
- ♦ Are there people in your family who are “weightist”? If so, can you talk to them about it?

Unit 5: Media Literacy

Many popular magazines convey the message that “perfect” happiness can be found in a “perfect” body; in a thinner—or curvier or somehow *different*—body, you’ll be more successful, loveable, etc. These messages can set the stage for unhealthy body preoccupation and disordered eating. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to look your best. And there’s nothing wrong with looking like a super model—*if* that’s your natural, healthy body shape. The problem is that 95% of us aren’t genetically wired to look like models. We need to develop eyes to see “pretty” and “beauty” in wider ways. Bring a critical eye to magazines. Be discriminating. Take what’s healthy and empowering—and leave the rest behind.

Questions to consider:

- ♦ What do you find really beautiful? List 10 things. These can be people, places, sounds, whatever’s beautiful to *you*.
- ♦ Write down the five things in life that you value most. Are these values represented on and within the covers of popular magazines?
- ♦ How much money do you spend on an annual basis trying to look beautiful? What are other ways you might allocate this money?

Unit 6: Nourishing Our Bodies

Eating helps you run faster, jump higher, swim farther and think better. Eating gives you energy to cope with all the stresses that are thrown your way. A typical healthy diet consists of three meals and several healthy snacks each day. Snacking can be healthy—it depends on whether or not you’re hungry and what you snack on. Some foods are power packed: loaded with vitamins, minerals, protein, and other nutrients. Others are “junk”: they might taste good, but they don’t have much nutritional value and leave you feeling lethargic and hungry for more soon after you eat

them. The important thing is to try to eat a variety of foods every day—and to keep the balance tipped in favor of “powerful” foods.

Questions to consider:

- ♦ Take stock of your cupboards: do you have foods from all five food groups in your home at all times? What kinds of snacks do you have on hand?
- ♦ Do you ever make your own eating habits a moral issue? (E.g., "I was so *good* today, I didn't eat any dessert.") What kind of message does this send your daughter?

Unit 7: Feeding Our Many Appetites

Human beings need to get fed every day in lots of different ways. When we experience “tummy hunger,” it’s time to eat and hydrate our bodies. We have other hungers too—like the need for friends or for alone-time—that food can’t satisfy. When you’re upset, eating might seem like the quickest way to calm down. There's a physiological reason for this: carbohydrates raise our serotonin levels, change our biochemistry, and calm us down in the short term. But long term, stuffing our feelings can cause us to feel powerless and depressed—and to develop an unhealthy relationship to food.

Menu of Hungers
Learning to Feed Your Whole Self

The next time you find yourself reaching for something to eat, stop and ask yourself: What am I *really* hungry for? What would *really* satisfy me? Read through the menu and see if anything looks appetizing:

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Tummy Hunger: | needs Nourishing Food |
| Intellectual Hunger: | needs Stimulation |
| Physical Hunger: | needs Movement |
| Friendship Hunger: | needs Companionship |
| Solitude Hunger: | needs Space |
| Spiritual Hunger: | needs Meaning |
| Creative Hunger: | needs Invention |

Questions to consider:

- ♦ Does your daughter ever see you overeat or undereat for emotional reasons? Under what circumstances is this most likely to happen?
- ♦ How can you take better care of yourself and nurture your varied appetites? Do you have supportive friends? Hobbies you love? Creative outlets? Time alone?
- ♦ Do you and your daughter bond with each other through eating? What are some other ways could you connect (e.g., go for a walk, watch a movie, clean out her closet, etc.)?

Unit 8: The Power of Healthy Relationships

Relational health is a key aspect of overall well-being. Take a minute to think about the people who are important in your life today: friends, family members of all ages, co-workers, people you love, and people you struggle with. (Struggle is a form of connection too.) Consider your strongest relationships. What is it that makes them strong? Conflict is an inevitable part of every relationship; how well we deal with conflict is often what makes the difference between healthy and unhealthy connection. Give-and-take is also important to keep relationships healthy—as long as you aren't asked to sacrifice your connection to yourself or your core values.

Questions to consider:

- ♦ Write down the name of a person with whom you'd like to have a stronger connection. Now list 3 things you can do to strengthen the relationship.
- ♦ Tell your daughter about ways you deal with problematic situations in a friendship or at work. Does she have any suggestions?

Call to Action Contract

- ★ I promise to try to combat weightism in myself and in my community.
- ★ I promise to try to understand, respect and include other people, no matter what they look like.
- ★ I promise to try to honor and accept myself, just the way I am.
- ★ I will do my best to eat healthfully and to nourish all of my many appetites.
- ★ I will try to make the world a better place by being "full of myself" in the best sense of the phrase and by "throwing my weight around" in healthy ways.

Signature _____

Date _____

We're in this together, differences included!

10 Practical Tips

Support Full of Ourselves at Home

- 1. Remember: there's no such thing as a "joke" about someone's body.** Research shows that teasing and harassment contribute to the development of eating disorders.
- 2. Set a good example through your own actions.** Demonstrate care and respect for your body. If you need help with your own relationship to food, see a doctor or nutritionist. Let your daughter know that you take yourself and your health seriously and that your goal is to eat healthfully and create a healthier lifestyle.
- 3. The same goes for words!** Never put yourself down for how you look in front of your daughter. Don't tolerate anyone else putting you down either—or your daughter or another person. Try not to greet friends with comments about appearance. Instead, practice taking people seriously for what they think, say and do.
- 4. Wear clothes that express who you are, regardless of your size or shape.** Don't let your body shape keep you from doing things you want because you don't "look the part."
- 5. Keep an eye out for weightist messages in the media** with your daughter. Name, discuss and refute them. Girls need to hear parental critique (and outrage) again and again.
- 6. Encourage and support your daughter in a sport and other activities** that give her the experience of living fully and masterfully in her body. Try something new with your daughter and build competency together.
- 7. Take stock of your cupboards.** Are they filled with foods from all food groups? What kinds of snacks are on hand? Supply your kitchen with a variety of low-cost, high-health foods.
- 8. Provide regular family meals.** A rule of thumb for meal times: parents are responsible for what, where and when a child eats; the child is responsible for how much and whether.
- 9. Avoid using food as a reward or punishment.** Find ways other than shopping or eating to celebrate your small victories on any given day. When your daughter is upset, try going for a walk, or making a cup of tea, and talking together—rather than going out to eat. Your time is one of the most nourishing resources you can offer her.
- 10. Let your daughter know that you love her, no matter what she weighs!** Listen to her opinions, show appreciation for her uniqueness and, as often as possible, allow her to take the lead. If you are worried about her weight, talk to her pediatrician or a nutritionist.

Snack Attack!

Do you or your daughter miss out on regular meals because of a busy schedule? Are either of you active in sports? Do you need more energy during the day? Try snacking! Be sure to have a variety of low-cost, high-health foods on hand—power foods, not junk—to keep you energized and strong.

Satisfying Tastes and Textures

Sometimes we crave snacks for their textures and how they'll feel and taste in our mouths. Here are some things you may not have already tried.

Finger foods: grapes, strawberries, blueberries, bananas, cherry tomatoes, raisins, dates, almonds, figs, dried pears or apricots, low-fat cheese sticks

Crunchy snacks: baby carrots, celery sticks, apples, cucumber slices, pepper strips, rice or popcorn cakes, "light" popcorn, whole grain crackers, breadsticks, flat bread, graham crackers, pretzels, low-fat granola bars, pickles

Refreshing snacks: fruit salad, melon wedges, oranges, grapefruit, kiwi, pineapple, sorbet, sherbet, Italian ice, frozen fruit popsicles, frozen grapes, vegetable juice, orange juice, apple juice, berry juice, homemade lemonade, herbal ice tea

Soothing snacks: fruit smoothies, applesauce, pudding, yogurt with fruit, vegetable soup, chicken or bean soup, hot chocolate with low-fat milk, bananas and low fat peanut butter

High-Energy Power Snacks

Combine carbohydrates and low-fat protein to satisfy your appetite and give you the best stamina and endurance. Here are some ideas.

low-fat yogurt
granola
fruit slices

whole-grain crackers
low-fat cheese
juice

flour tortilla
peanut butter and raisins
low-fat milk

1 pizza slice
1 cup of juice

pita bread
turkey, lettuce, tomato
1 cup juice

fruit smoothie: strawberries, ice,
berry juice, vanilla yogurt, protein
powder

flat bread
cottage cheese
fruit slices

cereal (whole grain)
low-fat milk
banana

whole-grain bread
tuna
lemonade

Warning Signs for Eating Disorders

Anorexia nervosa. Bulimia nervosa. Binge eating disorder. These three terms are notably absent from FOO. As our aim is eating disorders *prevention*, we purposefully avoid mention of these diseases. Study after study has found that talking about specific disordered eating "practices" does more harm than good. So we caution you against discussing eating disorders with girls. Like us, try to keep the focus on power, health and leadership.

That said, eating disorders are serious illnesses; the sooner warning signs and symptoms are recognized and responded to, the better the prognosis. Below is a list of warning signs to help you identify the presence of an eating disorder. While it is rare for one person to display all of these symptoms, people with eating disorders often manifest several of them.

If you're worried about your daughter, stay calm and call your pediatrician, internist, school nurse or counselor to share your concerns and learn about available resources for both your daughter and your family. You might want to meet with a referred therapist who has experience working with girls with eating disorders—initially with your partner, but without your daughter—to discuss the best strategy for approaching her.

- 1** Excessive preoccupation with weight/weighing, food, calories, and/or dieting
- 2** Excessive and/or compulsive exercise regimen: the need to “burn off” calories regardless of bad weather, fatigue, sickness, and/or injury
- 3** Withdrawal from activities because of the presence of food and/or weight concerns
- 4** Evidence of self-induced vomiting, or use of laxatives, diuretics, purgatives, enemas, diet pills
- 5** Evidence of binge-eating, including hoarding and/or stealing food
- 6** Alternating periods of severely restricting dieting and overeating, often accompanied by dramatic weight fluctuations
- 7** Other unusual eating behaviors: meal skipping, fear of eating in front of other people, ritualistic or secretive eating, cooking for others but not participating in enjoying the food
- 8** Abnormal weight loss of 25% or more, with no known medical illness accounting for the loss
- 9** Distorted body image and anxiety about being fat/weight gain that does not diminish as weight is lost
- 10** Loss of, irregularity of, or inexplicable problems with menstruation (in females)

Self-Assessment

Moms and Dads, take this short assessment to get a better idea of how well you are promoting healthy eating behaviors and body- and self-esteem at home.

| | Always | Sometimes | Rarely |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I eat sensibly and take good care of my body. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I tell my daughter what her strengths are. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Our cupboards are filled with a variety of healthy snacks. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I don't go on non-medically supervised diets. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I enjoy sitting down to a lovely meal without worrying about my weight | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I have read the sexual harassment and bullying policies at my daughter's school. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I don't make negative comments or tell jokes about other people's bodies. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I model good exercise habits for my daughter. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. I speak up when someone comments on my daughter's weight. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. I wear clothes that express who I am, regardless of my shape. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. I give my daughter as much control as possible over her body, clothes, food choices and room decoration. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. I encourage and support my daughter in sports and other activities that give her the experience of living masterfully in her body. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. I don't compare my daughter's appearance with her peers'. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. I speak respectfully about my body. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. I comment when see a negative portrayal of females in the media. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- 16. Whenever I hear a woman being put down unreasonably at any point in conversation, I refuse to stand by in silence.
- 17. My daughter and I spend quality time together in ways that don't involve shopping or eating.
- 18. I don't use food as a reward or punishment.
- 19. Our family eats one or more meals together every day.
- 20. I don't comment on my partner's weight.
- 21. I teach my daughter about advertising gimmicks.
- 22. I demonstrate respect for all women.
- 23. I talk about women I know who make the world a better place.
- 24. I talk with my daughter in a positive, genuine way about my own natural aging process.
- 25. I make sure my daughter gets annual medical check-ups.

Positive changes I'd like to make on behalf of my own and my daughter's health and well-being:
