

TWU Counseling Center

Addressing Your Bad Body Thoughts

adapted from Hirschmann, J. R., & Munter, C. H. (1995) When women stop hating their bodies: Freeing yourself from food and weight obsession

Step One: Apologize

Notice the bad body thoughts you have and respond to them with your caretaker voice. Apologize to yourself for having treated yourself so badly, for abusing yourself. If you doubt that these bad body thoughts are abusive, write down all your negative body thoughts and imagine saying them to someone you love. Would you ever be this cruel to someone else?

You have done nothing to deserve such abusive treatment and you deserve an apology.

Step Two: Challenge the authority of your bad body thought.

Challenge the belief behind your bad body thought. Repeat to yourself the phrase, “Who says?”. Challenge the cultural belief that there is a “right”, “best” or “perfect” body part, shape or size.

Remember that every part of your body is pleasing simply because it is a part of YOU.

Step Three: Set the thought aside

Put your bad body thought aside, dismiss it. If the bad body thought returns, simply refuse to entertain it. Bad body thoughts are often ways of translating your unnamed worries and concerns.

In this way, your hatred of your body has become tied to your emotional state. Oftentimes when you are feeling negative emotions or are feeling ambivalent about a situation, you translate those negative feelings into negative thoughts about your body. You must learn a different way of living in your body and a new, healthier way to deal with your emotions. This is a difficult process but one that is well worth it. Each time a bad body thought resurfaces, simply repeat steps 1, 2 and 3.

Remember that thoughts are simply thoughts; whether you dwell on them or not is ultimately up to you.

Step Four: Learn from your bad body thought

Bad body thoughts are never really about your body. Learn to decode your bad body thoughts and use them as a way to engage in self-exploration. When you have a bad body thought it often means that you are ambivalent about noticing something that you are thinking or feeling. Becoming adept at decoding bad body thoughts means addressing your real thoughts and feelings with compassion and understanding. The more compassionately you treat yourself, the less need you will have for the camouflage that bad body thoughts provide.

In order to decode your bad body thoughts, pay close attention to them and track them. Write them down as they occur and look at the context, both emotional and physical, in which your thoughts arise. What were you doing, feeling or thinking when you first noticed the bad body thought?