

Healing our relationship with our bodies

Nurturing Hope in Recovery



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01

About body image.

When we think about our bodies, the way we feel towards them is often a reflection of the amount of **love**, **worth** and **respect** we feel towards ourselves in general.

From day one, we absorb information that teaches us about the world as well as our place within it. We internalise messages about ourselves that go on to form **a narrative in our lives**.

Within these messages comes thoughts and feelings towards our bodies...and if we've ever been taught to criticise ourselves, that too will form part of our narrative.

It's important to know that these messages are just that – *messages*. Whether we hold onto them and **how we respond to them is within our power and our decision**.

The healing process.

With the advent of social media and tabloid journalism, the way we seek validation for ourselves from other people has been dramatically reduced to what's on the outside.

We encourage our clients to shift their focus and perspective, expanding it away from a dialogue around weight, shape and size, and instead to include personal interests, hobbies and relationships.

These latter aspects of our lives reflect our **true, inner essence** and shouldn't be limited by our own (or others') perception of our body.

Healing this relationship involves being **compassionately curious** about how we feel towards our bodies. Being **"body wise"** by being aware of what our body is telling us and learning to respond to those indicators in a **compassionate** way.

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The *Self* and the healing process

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“Beneath the surface of the protective parts of trauma survivors there exists an undamaged essence, a **Self** that is confident, curious, and calm, a **Self** that has been sheltered from destruction by the various protectors that have emerged in their efforts to ensure survival. Once those protectors trust that it is safe to separate, the **Self** will spontaneously emerge, and the parts can be enlisted in the healing process.”

— Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*

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Returning to our self.

At Orri, we believe that underneath the layers of life lessons, messages and experiences, is a true “self” that you can return to in time of need.

A big part of what we do in treatment is exploring the relationship we have with the “self”; learning ways to cultivate a **positive** relationship with it and building a sense of **self-trust** and **resilience**.

In this way, we can create a healthy boundary between our inner self and the things on the outside that may trigger us, such as social media, tabloid journalism, or challenging people in our lives.

*“I can see exactly how and why more people are wrestling with how to believe that **they are enough**. I see the cultural messaging everywhere that says that an ordinary life is a meaningless life...we are all vulnerable to the messaging that drives these behaviours...when love and belonging are hanging in the balance, we reach for what we think will offer us the most protection.”*
- Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly*



Recognising triggers.

You might want to start your journey by recognising the things that trigger negative body image.

Whether it's social media (dare we say, Instagram?), a certain person, or an experience (e.g. changing rooms) – if you're aware of situations or activities that trigger negative body image, you can then work to find healthy and compassionate ways to respond to these situations.

Activity:

Make a note of when and where your critical voice arises towards your body. Consider how you can respond lovingly to those challenging times and, if this is difficult, reach out to a specialist for additional support.



Transitions in life – such as moving house, changing jobs or moving to university – can significantly impact those who are in recovery from an eating disorder. These experiences often symbolise change and uncertainty, and can therefore cause a great deal of anxiety.

During these times of distress, we may notice that our go-to response is to start controlling and restricting food intake and weighing ourselves. At the time we may think “*I’m scared of gaining weight*”, but the **underlying fear** that’s causing this response may be “*I feel completely overwhelmed in the current situation*” or “*my anxiety has gone into overdrive*”.

Expand your internal dialogue beyond that of body weight or shape.

What does self-love mean to me?

What makes me laugh?

What am I thankful for?

What am I going to do to make sure I stay committed to loving me?

Who do I love, and who do I know loves me back?

What would I like to learn from scratch?

What's one way I can celebrate my body every day?

What do I love and value about myself?

What brings me joy?

What fulfills me?

What are my favorite ways to move my body?

What is one thing my body helped me do last in the last few days?

Positive body image isn't believing your body looks good; it's knowing your body is good, regardless of how it looks.

Shift perspective.

Social media is driven by positive engagements, meaning that often people's posts will strive to reinforce the positive.

As a result of this, when we're comparing ourselves to someone on social media, we're comparing ourselves to information that isn't fact.

Activity:

Conduct a social media "review" to clear out anything that causes you to reflect negatively on yourself – **it's okay to follow accounts that encourage you to love yourself and it's okay to unfollow (or "mute") people who cause the opposite.**

When it comes to looking at our physical appearance, we often look and see what we want to see as opposed to the reality. This means that if we believe we are unattractive in one way or another, we will look for things to reinforce and validate that message (this is called "confirmation bias").

We can tackle this by **being aware that this is our pattern of thinking.** Once we understand that it's become ingrained enough to feel like our reality, we can begin to **question it and reverse it.**

*"Body shame often is a coping mechanism, or a way that we try to problem-solve complex anxieties and stresses in our life."
– Summer Innanen*



Consistent mindful practice.

Healing our relationship with our bodies will not happen overnight. It is a gradual, incremental process that will involve consistent mindful practice.

The most important thing is **hope**: holding onto hope that things can and *will* get better in time, and hope that there is *another* way to feel and experience living in our bodies.

We see this happen every day at Orri.

Commit to learning about and investigating the feelings towards your body every day. Put pen to paper if things get overwhelming, and reach out to loved ones and specialist support for additional guidance.



And I said to my body. Softly. 'I want to be your friend.' It took a long breath. And replied, 'I have been waiting my whole life for this.' - Niyyirah Waheed

Further reading.

Nicole Schnackenberg, *Bodies Arising: Fall in Love with Your Body and Remember Your Divine Essence*

Kirstin Neff, *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*

Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*

**We're here to nurture hope
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