

More Than Just A Number

How Debunking Diet Culture Can Lead to a Positive Self-Image

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MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

The purpose of the MHTTC Network is technology transfer - disseminating and implementing evidence-based practices for mental disorders into the field.

Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the MHTTC Network includes 10 Regional Centers, a National American Indian and Alaska Native Center, a National Hispanic and Latino Center, and a Network Coordinating Office.

Our collaborative network supports resource development and dissemination, training and technical assistance, and workforce development for the mental health field. We work with systems, organizations, and treatment practitioners involved in the delivery of mental health services to strengthen their capacity to deliver effective evidence-based practices to individuals. Our services cover the full continuum spanning mental illness prevention, treatment, and recovery support.

The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND
ACCEPTING OF
DIVERSE CULTURES,
GENDERS,
PERSPECTIVES,
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND
FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH
OUR ACTIONS,
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

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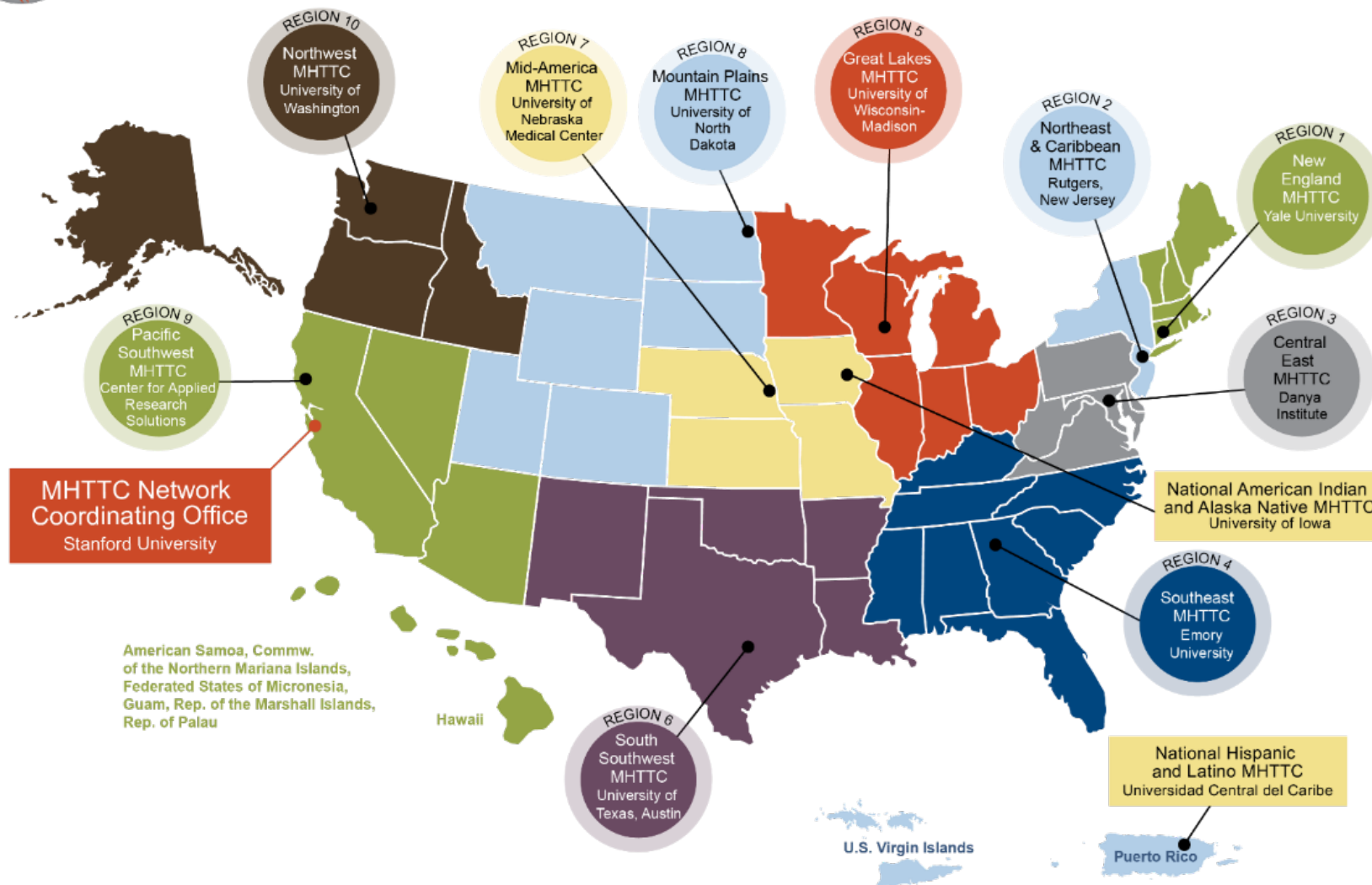


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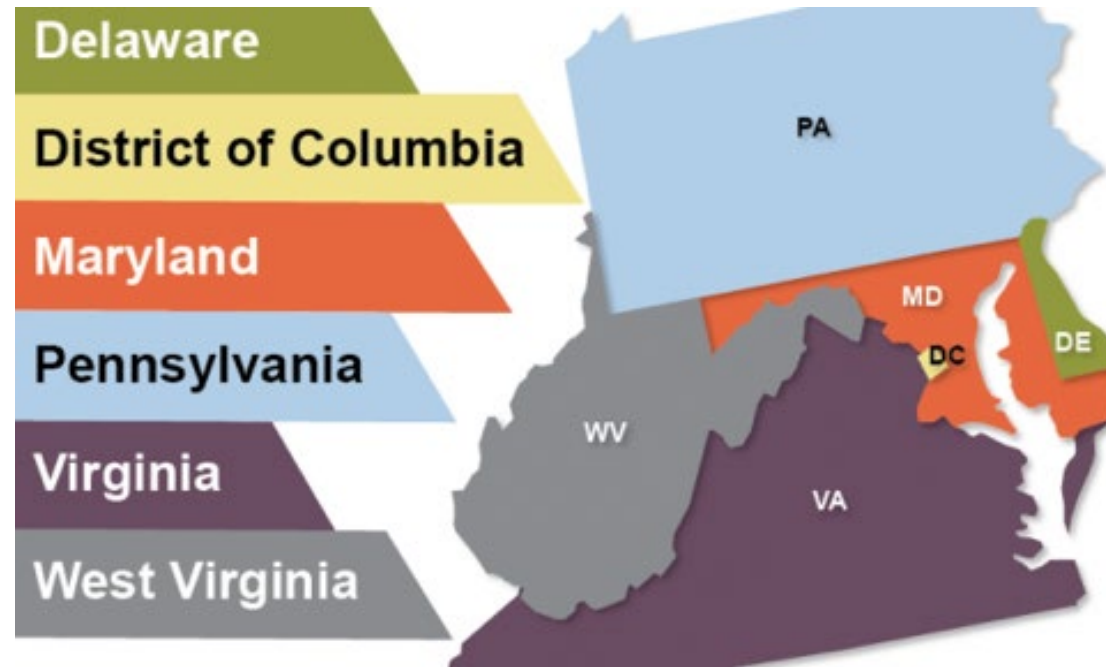
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Central East Region 3



Central East (HHS Region 3)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

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Acknowledgment

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The opinions expressed herein are the views of the authors and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this document is intended or should be inferred.

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Presented 2023

Rock Recovery Overview

ABOUT US

Rock Recovery is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that frees people from disordered eating by bridging the gap in existing treatment options and offers community outreach and education.

MISSION

Rock Recovery's mission is to support the journey to freedom from disordered eating through individual recovery and community empowerment programs.

VISION

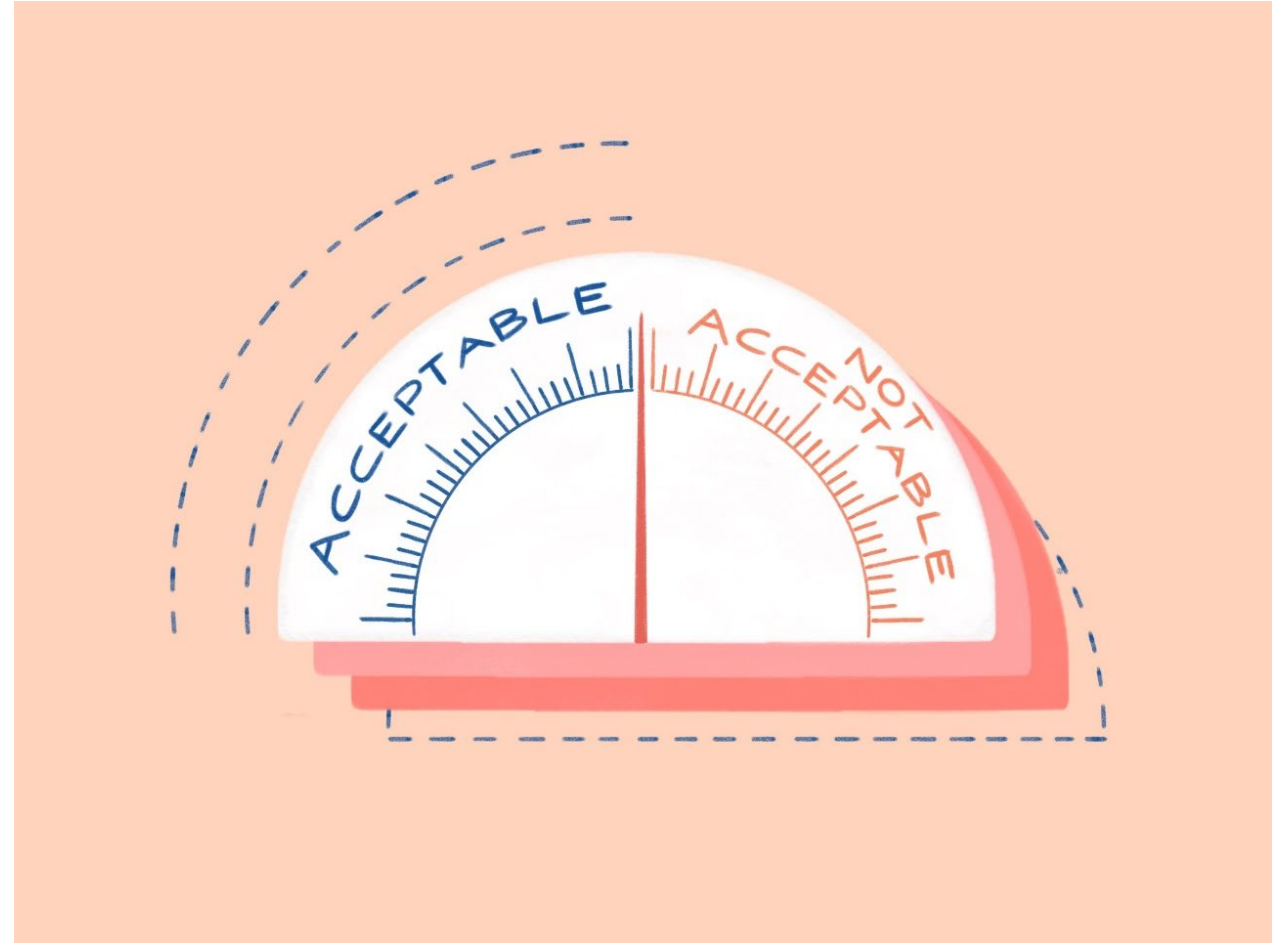
A world where disordered eating is understood, and the journey to freedom is fully supported.



Part 1: Diet culture debunked

In this section:

- Define diet culture
- Debunk myths & stereotypes
- Identify long-term impacts of diet culture



[Source](#)

“A system of beliefs that worships thinness and equates it to health and moral virtue, meaning you can spend your whole life thinking you’re irreparably broken just because you don’t look like the impossibly thin ‘ideal.’”

– Christy Harrison, Registered Dietitian, CEDS



[Source](#)

What is diet culture?

1. Diet culture refers to a rigid set of expectations about valuing thinness and attractiveness over physical health and emotional well-being.
2. Diet culture often emphasizes “good” versus “bad” foods, focuses on calorie restriction, and normalizes self-deprecating talk.
3. Diet culture often equates a person’s health with their morality (*You are less than if you don’t eat well and if your body does not fit society’s standards of acceptable*)
4. Diet culture is toxic, and it can be a risk factor for body dysmorphia, disordered eating, and other mental health issues.

EXAMPLES OF DIET CULTURE:

1

FEELING LIKE YOU CAN'T ESCAPE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT WEIGHT, DIETS, GOOD/BAD FOODS, CUTTING CARBS, DETOXING, CLEANSING, CALORIES, MACROS, ETC.

2

EXERCISE IS ADVERTISED AS A MODE FOR WEIGHT LOSS, A MEANS TO BECOME MORE ATTRACTIVE, OR PUNISHMENT FOR EATING

3

WEIGHT LOSS CHALLENGES IN WORKPLACES, AMONGST FAMILY MEMBERS, OR FRIENDS

4

A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER THAT FOCUSES ON BMI AND OVERLOOKS ASSESSING OTHER HEALTH MARKERS, FITNESS LEVEL, MOBILITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

5

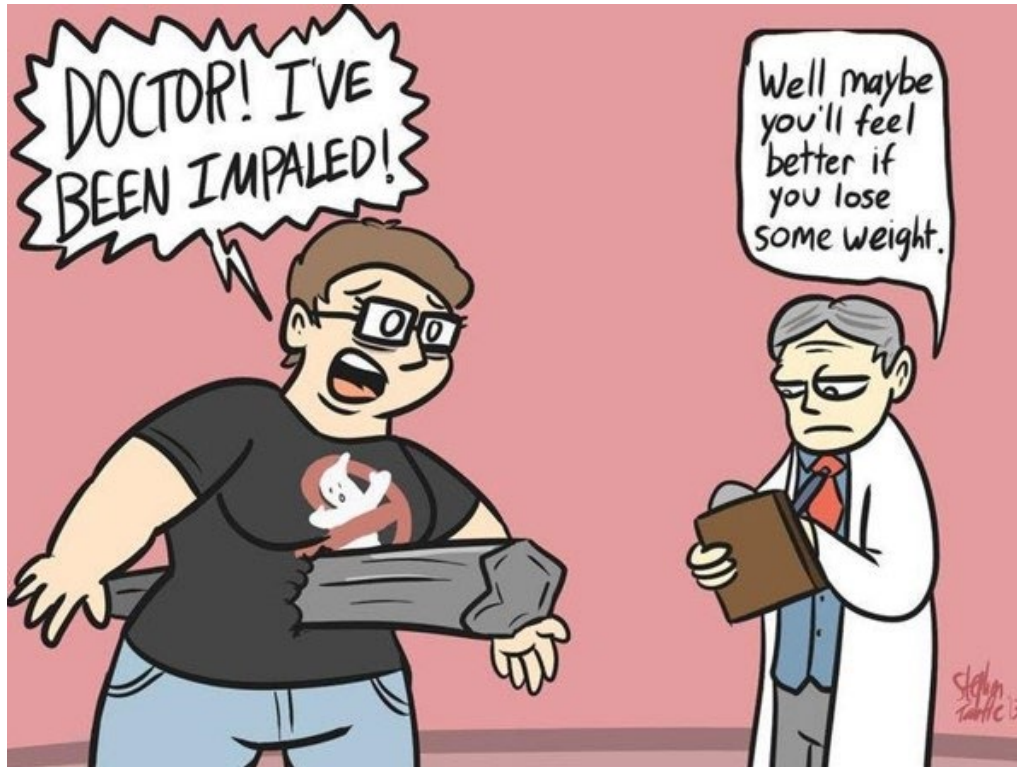
BEFORE-AND-AFTER PHOTOS, THIN IDEALS, FIT IDEALS. ANYTHING THAT GENERATES A FEAR OF FAT OR POSITIONS LARGE AS LESS VALUABLE

6

PRAISING PEOPLE FOR VIGILANT EATING AND/OR WEIGHT LOSS

[Source](#)

What are some of the long-term effects of diet culture?



Source

- By age 6, girls especially start to express concerns about their weight or shape
- 40 - 60% of elementary school girls are concerned about their weight or about becoming “too fat” (Smolak, 2011)
- Over 1/2 of teenage girls and nearly 1/3 of teenage boys use unhealthy behaviors to control their weight (i.e. - skipping meals, dieting, smoking, purging)(Neumark-Sztainer, 2005).
- Our healthcare system often reinforces harmful diet culture behaviors (i.e. - dieting, fasting, restriction, over exercise) and weight stigma
 - Body Mass Index (BMI) was not designed for “every body”
 - Weight is not an accurate measure of health
 - Weight bias can have extremely negative effects on a person’s mental and physical health

Part 2: What is Health at Every Size® (HAES)?

In this section:

- Define HAES ®
- Debunk myths around HAES ®
- Unlink health and weight



[Source](#)

Health at Every Size® defined:

- “The HAES movement is a continuously evolving alternative to the weight-centered approach to treating clients and patients of all sizes...
- It is also a movement working to promote size acceptance, to end weight discrimination and stigma, and to lessen the cultural obsession with weight loss and thinness” (www.asdah.org/about-asdah).



[Source](#)

The Five Principles of HAES®



[Source](#)

- Weight inclusivity
- Health enhancement
- Eating for well-being
- Respectful care
- Life-enhancing movement

What HAES® is not

- Saying that everyone IS healthy at every size.
- Suggesting that health doesn't matter.
- Claiming that all foods are nutritionally equivalent.
- Denying the *correlation* between weight and health.



Source Unknown

Unlinking weight & health



- Correlation does not equal causation. (Flegal et al., 2019)
- Even if they were causally linked, we do not have a reliable, safe way to shrink peoples' bodies
- Intentional weight loss interventions (diets) DO NOT lead to sustained, significant weight loss for most people. (Mann et al., 2007)
- We would never prescribe a medication with that kind of failure rate

Even if weight caused poor health outcomes, and people were personally and individually responsible for their weight, people still deserve respect.



Part 3: Why does this matter?

In this section:

- Understand HAES ® vs. weight-centric approach to care
- Discuss positive self-image and embodiment
- Take actionable steps toward advocating for care



[Source](#)

Risks of a Weight-Centric Approach

- Eating disorders!
- Avoidance of medical care (Messinger et al., 2018)
- Reinforces systemic stigma and discrimination (Puhl et al., 2014)
- Health risks of systemic discrimination (Leger et al., 2022)
- May miss or misdiagnose health issues due to weight-based stereotyping



Benefits of a HAES ® approach

(Blake et al., 2013; Tylka et al., 2014)

- Increased self-worth
- Increase in positive relationship with body
- Increased engagement in health enhancing behaviors
- Decreased cholesterol and blood pressure
- Increased connection with ongoing medical care
- Improved mental health outcomes



Source

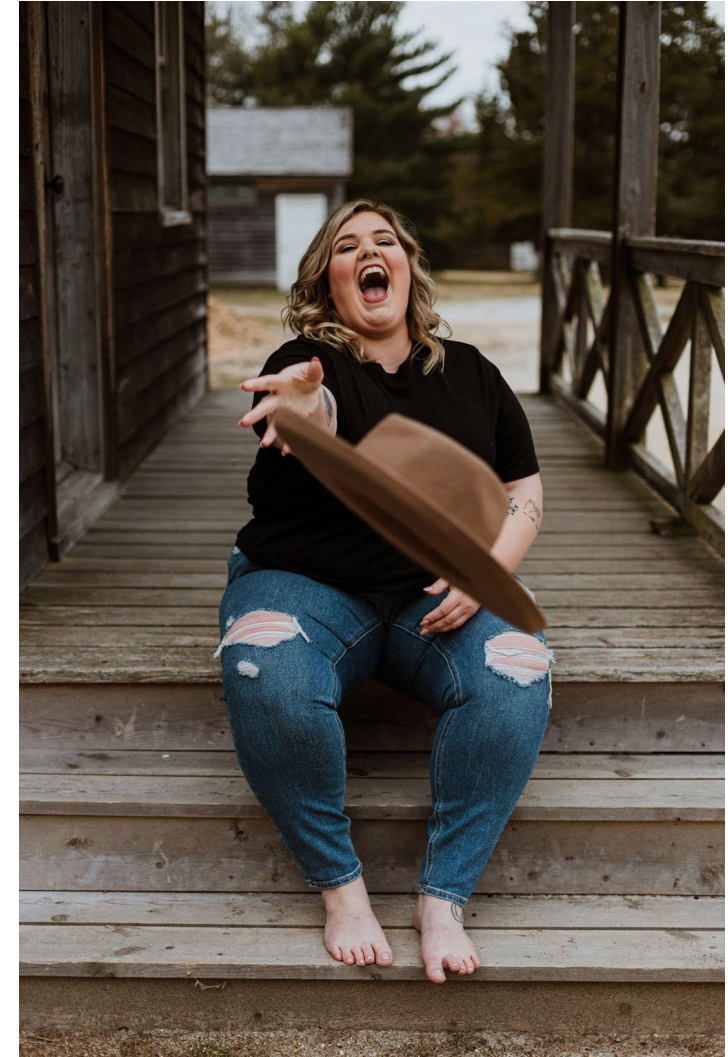
Implicit Bias

- Harvard's Implicit Attitudes Test (Goldberg, 2019)
- Implicit Bias among mental health professionals, including eating disorder providers (Puhl, et al., 2014)
 - Even among those who endorsed feeling prepared and equipped to work with “obese” individuals
 - Worse among thinner and those trying to lose weight



Positive Self-Image & Embodiment

- Positive self-image is an “inside job”
 - Reframe your body as your **home**
 - Find ways to increase your sense of **embodiment**
 - **Practice kindness** toward your body, as you would toward a loved one, no matter how it looks or what its limitations are
 - **Invest** in clothes that fit comfortably and express your style



Taking Action: More Than Just a Number

- Take the test to assess your own implicit bias
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/Study?tid=-1>
- Listen, read, and learn
 - Maintenance Phase podcast
 - What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat by Aubrey Gordon (Book)
 - Association for Size Diversity & Health
- Make sure your own work space is comfortable for all sizes
- Practice advocating for yourself and others in your own spaces
 - Doctor's office, at work, with friends/family

Resources

Rock Recovery - Therapy Services & Faith Support Groups

- <https://www.rockrecovered.org>
 - Individual therapy
 - Meal support & body image groups (virtual/in-person for MD, VA and DC)
 - Faith-based virtual support groups nationwide
 - Rock Referral Guide - Therapists, dietitians and treatment centers in the area

Association for Size Diversity & Health (ASDAH)

- Information on weight inclusivity and Health At Every Size ®
- Community and special events

The Alliance for Eating Disorders:

- <https://www.allianceforeatingdisorders.com>
 - Helpline
 - Resource guide
 - Nationwide support groups

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- The MHTTC Network is funded through SAMHSA to provide this training. As part of receiving this funding we are required to submit data related to the quality of this event.
- At the end of today's training please take a moment to complete a **brief** survey about today's training.

[Evaluation Link](#)



Eating Disorders Webinar Series

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Eating Disorders 101 and an Introduction to Intuitive Eating

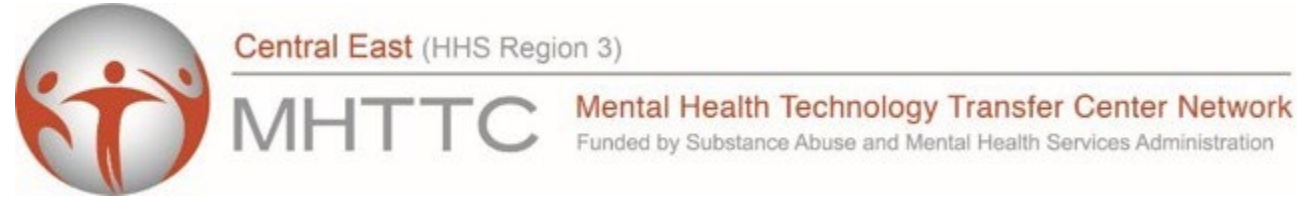
March 21, 2023

**More Than Just a Number: How Debunking Diet Culture
Can Lead to a Positive Self-Image**

April 25, 2023

**The Truth About Food Addiction
11:00am – 12:30pm ET**

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