

# **Becoming Kids' Role Model for Positive Food Relationship and Healthy Body Image**

(Even If You Haven't Figured It Out for Yourself)

Mental Health America

Eating Disorders Awareness Week

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# Agenda

- Diet Culture & “Body Ideal” Messages – the impact on kids’ health
- Protecting Health and Wellbeing as it Relates to a Child’s Relationship with Food and Body
- Common questions about feeding and growth– with answers from expert Celia Framson,
- Ask Us Anything

# Diet Culture & “Body Ideal” Messages

**The impact on kids’ health**

**Our Body**

**Food**

What are eating disorders?

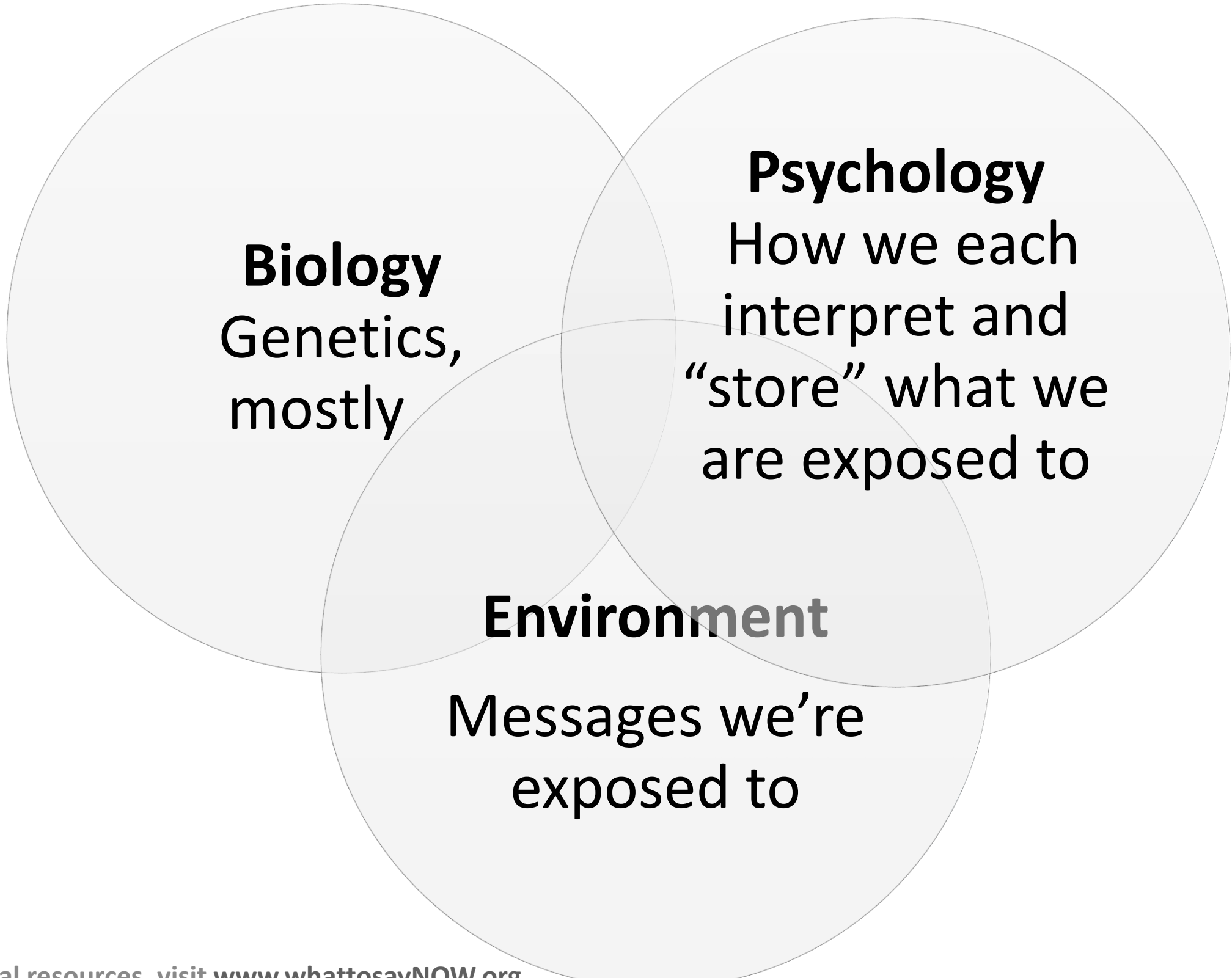
What is disordered eating?

What causes disordered eating or an eating disorder?



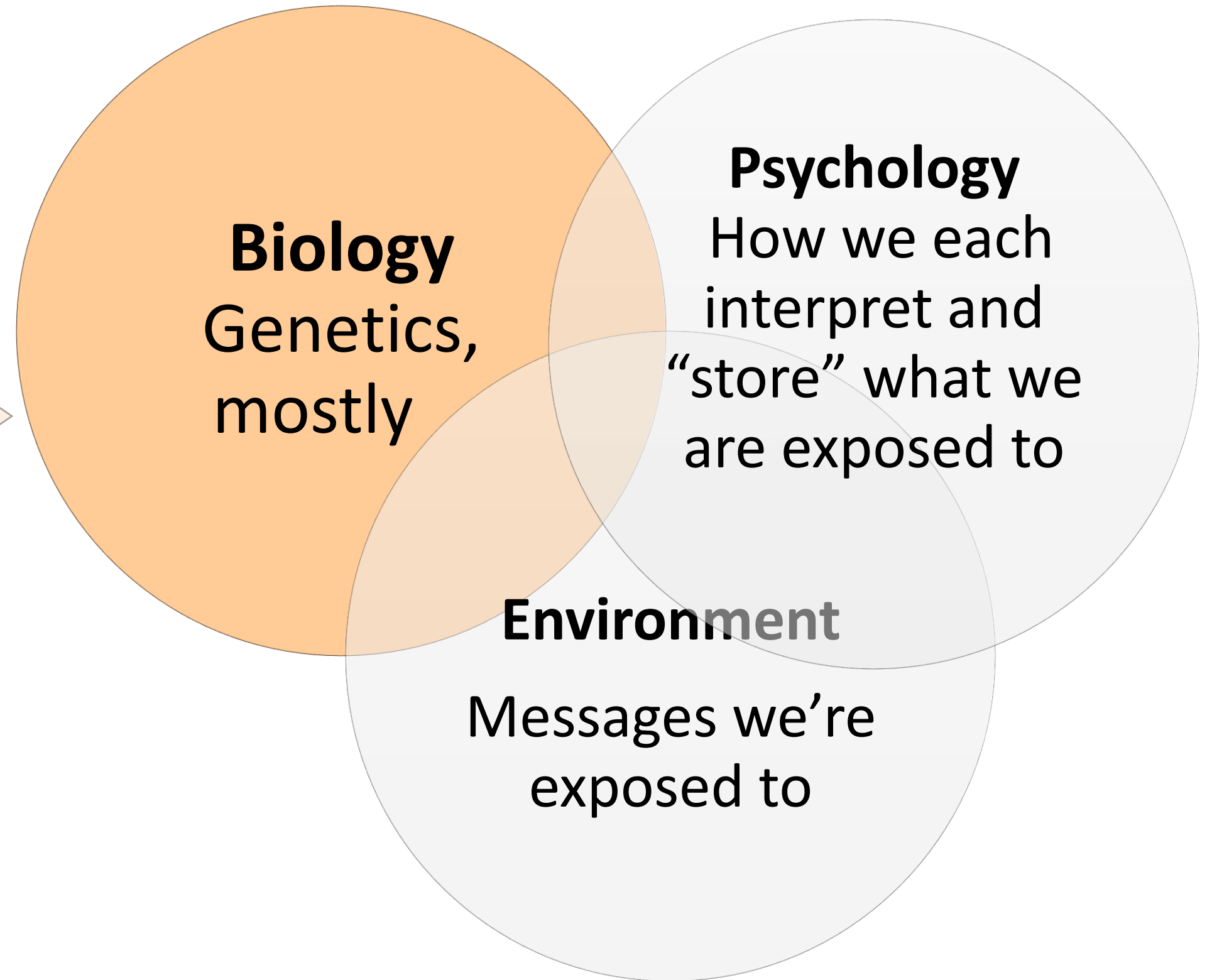


# What factors support a path toward disordered eating/eating disorders?

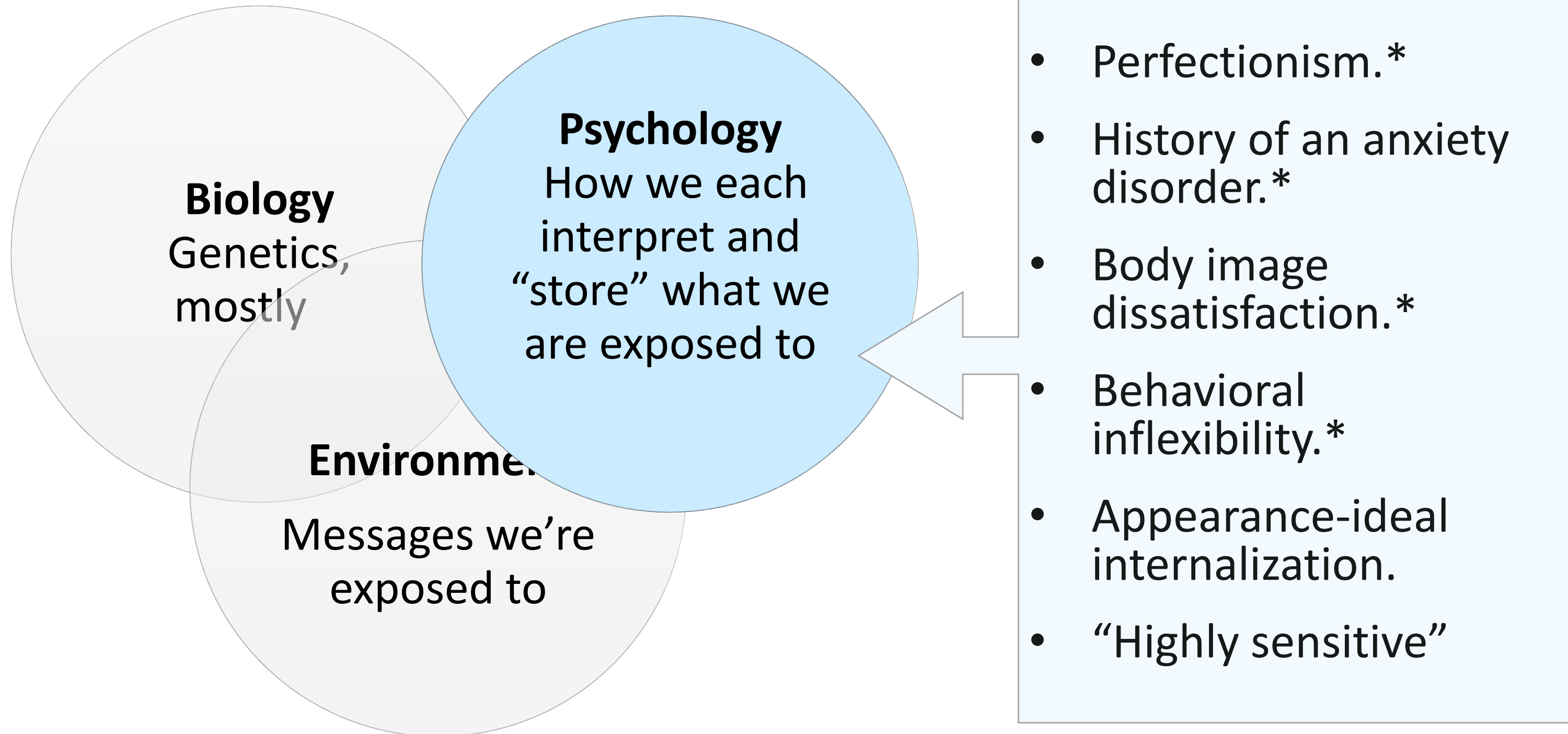


# What factors support a path of disordered eating and eating disorders?

- Genetics.
- Familial history of an eating disorder. \*
- Familial history of other mental health conditions.\*
- Negative energy balance
- High BMI.\*



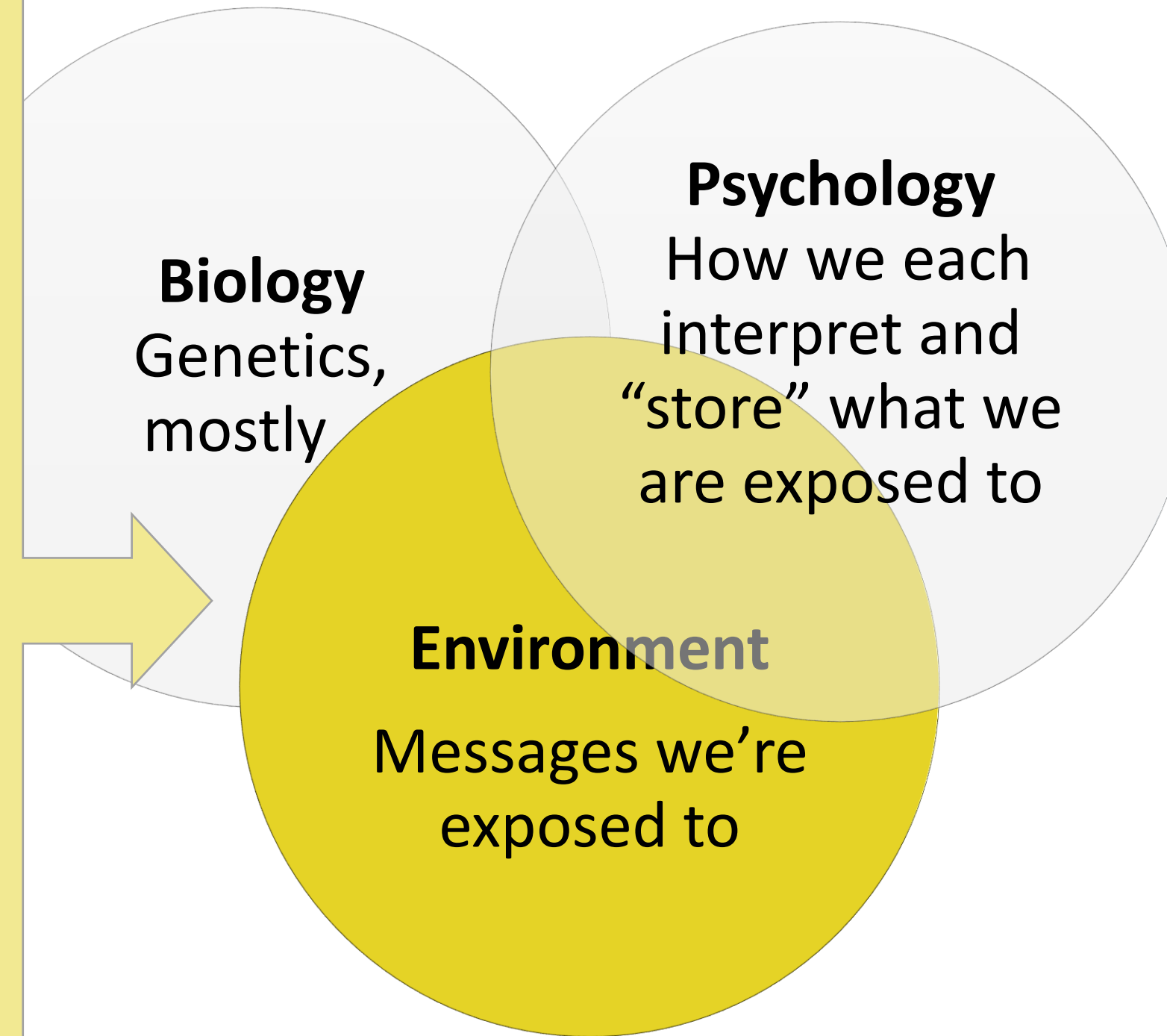
# What factors support a path of disordered eating and eating disorders?





# What factors support the path of disordered eating and eating disorders?

- **Role modeling of dieting or disordered eating** – promoting a diet culture (intentionally or unintentionally)
- **Cultural /family expectations** to be a certain weight (or BMI or chart %), body size, or shape to fit a “body ideal”.
- **Weight stigma/Body Ideal:** Messages that “thinner” is better - which can come from family, peers, coaches, physicians, greater society.
- **Weight-related teasing**
- **Acculturation.** People from racial and ethnic minority groups dealing with complex interactions between stress, acculturation, and body image.



# Is there more “environment” than we’ve traditionally assumed? Are the Biology and the Psychology necessarily a direct pathway to DE/ED?

## Psychology –or Biology?

- Perfectionism.\*
- History of an anxiety disorder.\*
- Behavioral inflexibility.\*

## Psychology – or Environment?

- Body image dissatisfaction.

## Biology – or Environment?

- Familial history of an eating disorder.\*
- Familial history of other mental health conditions.\*
- High BMI.\*

**Biology**  
Genetics,  
mostly

**Psychology**  
How we each  
interpret and  
“store” what we  
are exposed to

**Environment**

Messages  
we’re exposed  
to

# Summary: Path to Disordered Eating / of Eating Disorders

- 1) Many risk factors can contribute to a child “getting on the path” to disordered eating or an eating disorder.
- 2) Some risks we cannot eliminate—but we can be aware of these risks and add necessary support or boundaries.
- 3) Adults are in an important position to help eliminate or reduce key risks.**
- 4) Awareness of all the risk factors increase opportunity for
  - Role modeling that promotes health and wellbeing;
  - Appropriate additional support (or boundaries) when necessary or helpful;
  - Early identification – when we see early signs of disordered eating or an eating disorder, early ID is crucial for treatment success.

Adults are in an important position to reduce some key risks that contribute to disordered eating/eating disorders.



**We send kids an incredibly powerful message about what matters with food and body:**

Health and well-being

or

Diet culture / Body ideal

# Disclaimer

**The following is not for everyone.**

**Only for those who decide ...**

**...a child's mental and physical health (in whatever body size health looks like for that child).**

**Matter more than...**

...weight, body size, shape, or restrictive dieting (good foods v. bad foods) ...

Do you agree the top priority is a child's wellbeing and health (in whatever body size health looks like for that child)?

If yes, here is how you can help protect that health and wellbeing as it relates to a child's relationship to food and their body.

Help Protect Health and Wellbeing  
for a child's relationship to food  
and their body

# 1

## Identify and question the following harmful, engrained presumptions you live with:

- It is health promoting to diet, label and avoid bad foods, engage in exercise with the goal of changing your body size or shape.
- Thinner, lower weight is ideal, better, or favorable for health.
- Higher weights are unhealthy or less desirable in any way.
- Body size/weight first, then health.

2

**Be aware that we send kids a powerful message about what matters most for body and mind:**

Health and well-being  
ideal

or

Diet culture / Body-size

# Focusing on health and wellbeing

When we focus on health and wellbeing as the priority with and around kids:

- Kids will learn having a healthy body and a healthy mind is what matters most.
- Kids will feel learn and feel empowered to participate in taking care of their minds and bodies.
- Teaching kids health-focused behaviors leads kids to engage in health promoting behavior.
- A child's healthy weight will follow from healthy behaviors.
- A child's mental health will follow from prioritizing wellbeing.

## Prioritizing a body ideal or diet-culture with kids.

- Doing so contributes to a child feeling shame about their body or about foods they like.
- It can also lead to kids dieting or restricting foods –a top determinant of a child going on to develop an eating disorder, or disempowered.
- The result is kids may restrict foods, or other unhealthy behavior
- We cannot change a child's weight. A child's healthy weight, unique to each child, is the result of a child engaging in healthy behaviors.



3

**Notice and work to change** expectations to be a certain weight, body size, or shape that fits the cultural “**body ideal.**”

# What do we mean by “body ideal”?

3

- Belief that a certain body size, shape, or weight is desirable or necessary to be healthy or happy
- Holding body size, weight or appearance as essential to feeling good or fulfilled
- Applauding weight loss
- Negatively judging weight gain

# Why is believing in, supporting, or talking about a “body ideal” harmful?

3

- (1) the body’s we hold out as ideal are typically impossible, and, if technical possibly are not healthy
- (2) by holding out an ideal, we send a message that other than the ideal is wrong or bad. It makes us, as adults feel bad.
- (3) For kids—at least 30%--they receive those body ideal messages as “if you’re not that, you’re wrong or bad or less than” and take harmful action to pursue something that is impossible and unhealthy.
- (4) It makes us feel bad, less-than, or as if something is wrong with us.
- (5) It wastes our time.
- (6) It wastes our brain space.
- (7) It wastes our money.



**Notice and work to change “diet culture” talk and behavior in every child’s environment.**

# What do we mean by “diet culture”?

4

- Dieting – restricting what we eat in order to lose or maintain weight
- A culture that considers food as “good or bad” as “fattening or not fattening” as “healthy or unhealthy” (i.e. promoting the idea that food choices are a moral issue)
- Cutting out foods because of an idea that the food will increase our body size or weight
- Applauding weight loss, holding out smaller bodies or people in smaller bodies as more beautiful or desirable
- Condemning or negatively judging weight gain or larger bodies

# Why is diet culture harmful?

4

- It promotes dieting which is the #1 cause of eating disorders.
- It suggests that restricting or limiting foods is positive, healthful, or necessary. Restricting or limiting foods is harmful and results in negative physical and emotional outcomes.
- Dieting does not result in weight loss that is healthful.
- It wastes a lot of brain space.
- It wastes our time.
- It robs us of energy.
- It robs us of money.

# 5

## Set boundaries (with media and other adults)

- Select positive media and get rid of diet-culture/body-ideal media
- Make specific requests (of teachers, coaches, doctors, grandparents) to protect our kids from the unintentionally, well-meaning but harmful messages

5

## Set boundaries (with media)

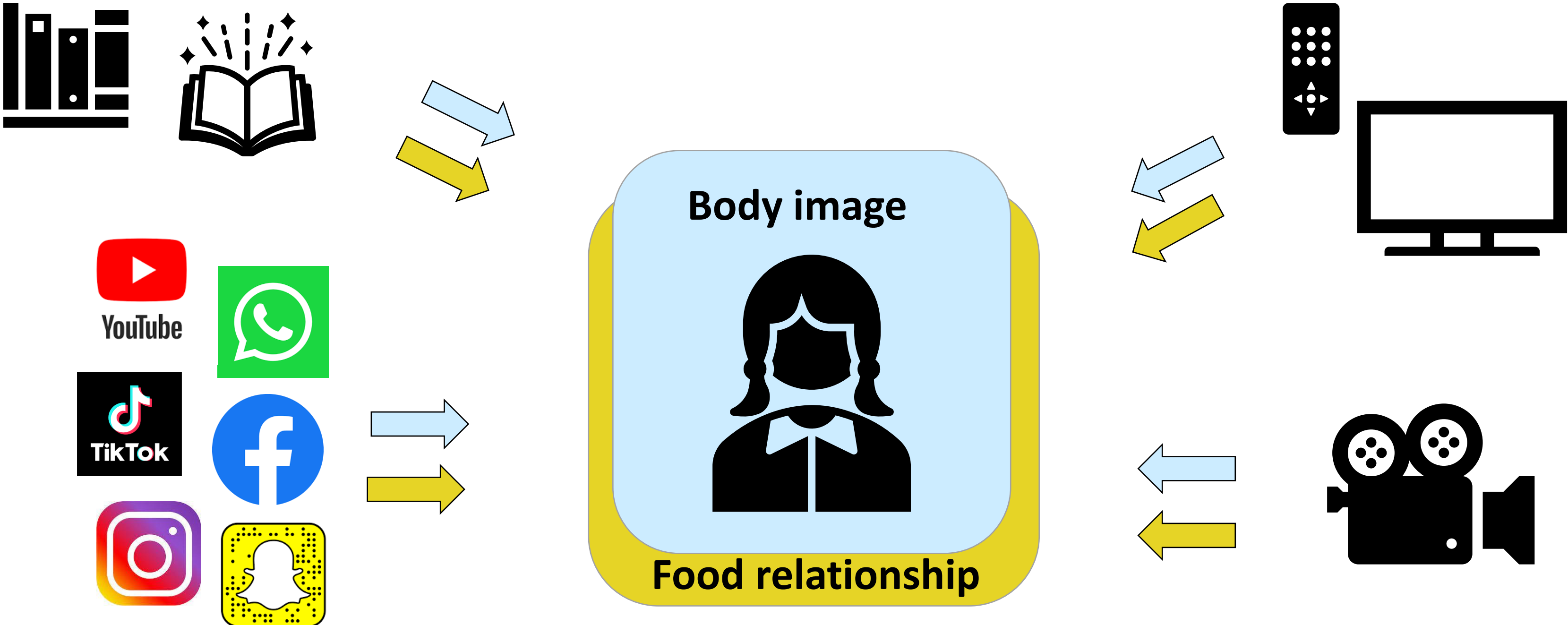
Select positive media and get rid of diet-culture/body-ideal media



Media boundaries:

What messages are we allowing our kids to be exposed to?

**Diet culture / Body-size ideal OR Health and wellbeing?**



5

## Set boundaries (with other adults)

- Make specific requests (of teachers, coaches, doctors, grandparents) to protect our kids from the unintentionally, well-meaning but harmful messages

(In addition to requests about eliminating diet culture and body ideal talk, you can make requests re media, too)

# Requests of other Role Models:

Health & Wellbeing, and no to Diet Culture/Body Ideal

**TEACHERS**

**KIDS**

**PARENTS**

**MEDIA**

**COACHES**

**HEALTHCARE**



# Parent Power Pack



Get Additional Resources  
[WhattosayNOW.org](http://WhattosayNOW.org)



**SUMMARY:** Help Protect Health and Wellbeing for a child's relationship to food and their body

- 1) Identify and question your own “body-ideal” and “diet-culture” beliefs.
- 2) We send kids incredibly powerful messages about food and body. Will you choose healthy and wellbeing – OR – diet culture and body ideal?
- 3) Diet culture messages are powerful. Protect kids from them.
- 4) Harmful “body ideal” messages are powerful. Protect kids from them.
- 5) Set boundaries to protect kids – with requests of other adult role models, and with media

# WHAT to SAY

WithAll 

Parent Power Pack



You've got questions, we've got experts!

## What to Say Q&A

Check out videos from experts answering your real-life questions about how to help the kids in your life to feel appreciative and positive about their body and food.

Get Additional Resources  
[WhattosayNOW.org](http://WhattosayNOW.org)

WHAT to SAY  GUIDE FOR **FAMILY MEMBERS**


WHAT to SAY  GUIDE FOR **COACHES**


WHAT to SAY  GUIDE FOR **HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS**

WHAT to SAY  GUIDE FOR **TEACHERS**

TO PREVENT EATING DISORDERS & INSPIRE WELL-BEING

## A Parent's Guide to Social Media



WHAT to SAY 

After completing intensive-level treatment for an eating disorder.

— “ —  
**Treatment showed me the importance of honoring my body, and I learned how to discern which messages are aimed at changing it versus caring for it.**

— ” —  
**ANONYMOUS**



# Common Kids' Feeding & Growth Questions

Celia Framson  
MPH, RD, CSP; Clinical  
Dietitian IV; Eating Disorders  
Program  
Children's Hospital Los  
Angeles



## FAQ re Kids' Feeding & Growth

- What if a kid seems to be gaining weight too quickly? Just over the last two months, my daughter has gotten a lot “thicker” and I’m worried her snacks or meals aren’t right for her. How do I know if she’s growing as she should, and not too quickly?
- What if a kid is “obese” or has a lot of unhealthy excess weight?
- What if a kid is losing weight too quickly?
- What SHOULD you talk about if you're trying not to talk about weight?

# FAQ re Kids' Feeding & Growth

- How do you talk about food in way other than "healthy food" versus "unhealthy food"?
- What about if your child seems to crave ice cream as a snack? So we can try to replace with another type of dairy, but if the child just really wants and loves ice cream, is it okay to let them eat it every day?
- How do you help families feed their kids well in the context of food insecurity?
- What if you have a different ways of feeding of kids but you have a two parent household and that other household does it differently?

Your questions, please!