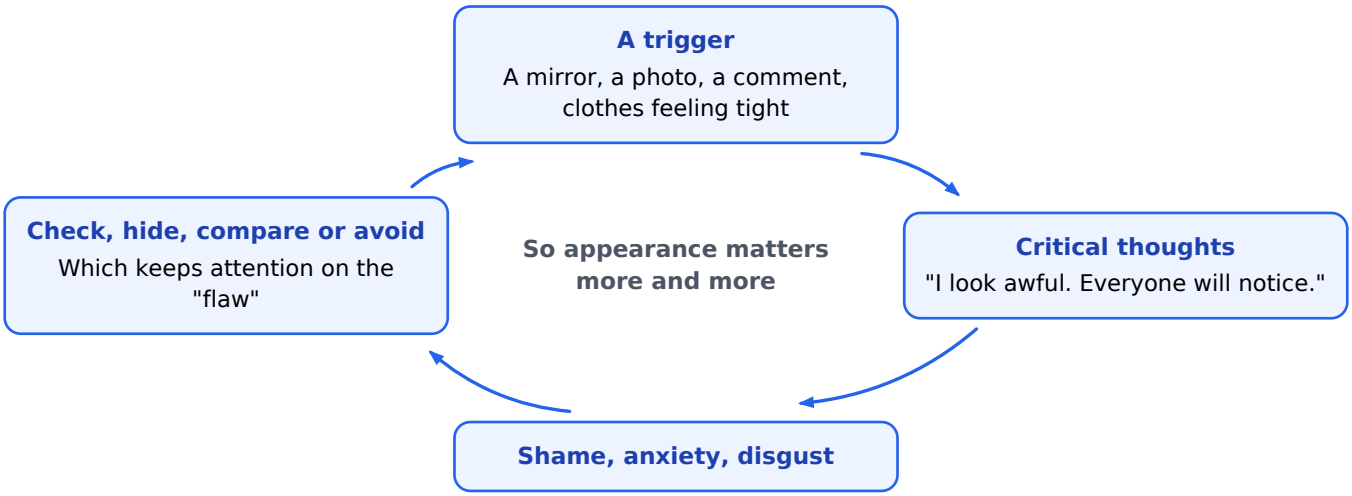
Understanding body image

How you see and feel about your body, which is not the same as how it looks.

Body image is the picture you hold of your body in your mind, and the thoughts and feelings that go with it. It is shaped by family comments, teasing, culture, media and experiences, and it can be very different from what other people see.

How a negative body image keeps going



Things that keep it going

- **Checking.** Mirrors, pinching, weighing, comparing photos. Looking closely magnifies what you see.
- **Avoiding.** Mirrors, photos, swimming, intimacy, certain clothes. You never find out that it would have been all right.
- **Comparing.** Usually with people who seem to look better, and often with edited images.
- **Measuring your worth by your appearance.**

What helps

1. Cutting back on checking and comparing.
2. Gradually doing the things you have been avoiding.
3. Noticing what your body does for you, not only how it looks.
4. Widening what your self-worth rests on.
5. Speaking to yourself as you would to someone you love.

When to get specialist help

If you are restricting food, bingeing, making yourself sick, exercising to compensate, or thinking about your shape and weight most of the day, please talk to your GP. Bodywhys, the Eating Disorders Association of Ireland (bodywhys.ie), offers information and support.

How my feelings about my body affect what I do, and do not do

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.