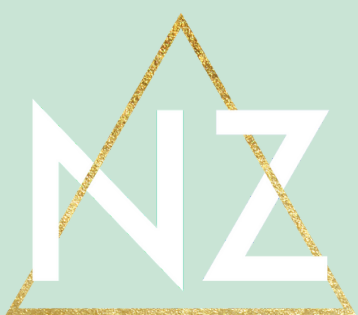


HOW TO BE AN

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A LANGUAGE GUIDE TO
SUPPORTING THOSE IN
RECOVERY FROM
DIET TRAUMA



Why I wrote this guide...

After over a decade of living entrenched in diet culture and mentality, I have both heard and engaged in diet talk more years of my life than not.

Not only was it potentially triggering to those around me who I wasn't aware were struggling with their own recovery, but it didn't do anything to improve my own health, or relationship to food, eating, or my body image.

Now as a binge and diet recovery coach, there is rarely a session I have where a client of mine isn't struggling with a comment made by a (often well-meaning) friend, coworker, partner, or family member.

The truth is, as a society we are holding on to a LOT of body image trauma, and that often trickles into comments we make daily about our own bodies, others' bodies, food, exercise, and much more that I will dive into in this guide.

Why I wrote this guide...

This guide isn't meant to be preach-y, demand-y, judgmental or passive aggressive.

As an educational document, the goal of this guide is to share best practices in conversation from those of us who have struggled or are currently working on healing.

I share this in hopes that we can all support each other's healing and help to create a safe space for any individual who--whether knowingly or not--may be struggling to find ease and comfort in their body and around food.

The guide was created from my own experiences, as well as the experience of over 20 other women and men.

If you have any questions or comments, please reach out to me at natalie@nataliezises.com

The following are terms, phrases, questions, and statements to avoid using. They are grouped into categories so you can better understand why they may be triggering.

Praising Weight-loss

- ie: "You look great! Have you lost weight?"
- "Look at that body!"
- "You skinny mini!"
- "Looking lean!"
- "You look so fit."
- "I need to get my summer body."
- "When are you getting back into shape?"

Why are these problematic?

These comments perpetuate the belief that thin is better than fat, and that our worth is reliant on our body shape and size. The pressure to achieve or maintain a certain weight and use food to manipulate our bodies into that shape creates a stressful and inevitably disordered relationship to food. Body diversity exists for myriad reasons: genetics, hormones, environment, life circumstance are a few. When we reward folks for thinner bodies, we assume a lot about their life circumstance. Weight-loss is often the result of disordered eating or illness, including hormonal diseases, cancer, anxiety and depression. Let's not praise that.

What to say instead?

If someone asks for a comment about their body, saying something like: "you always look beautiful to me", is a nice weight-neutral compliment.

Judging Someone's Food Choices

- "Is that a good choice?"
- "Do you really want that?"
- "You're being so good!"
- "How are you still hungry?"
- "Wow you're really hungry!"
- "I guess you really enjoyed that."
- "I'm being bad today."
- "It's my cheat day/meal."

Why are these problematic?

Moralizing or judging food choices, either of yourself or others, is another way to add tension and stress to decisions around food, which can lead to restriction, reactionary or binge eating, and again, an overall disordered relationship to food.

It can also lead to habits like hiding and hoarding food as the individual no longer feels comfortable eating in your presence.

It does not lead to "better" food habits, although that may be the hope behind the comment.

What to say instead:

- Pro-food conversations! Talk about how delicious your food is, how excited or grateful you are to enjoy this food.
- Nothing. This is another opportunity to do some self-reflection on why commenting on others' food choices feels necessary. What personal biases may be arising? Where can you invite more ease into food decisions both for yourself and others?

Moralizing Food Comments

- Labeling something as "junk food", "dangerous", "unhealthy", "good" or "bad", "clean", "indulgent", "too caloric"
- Using the word "healthy" to describe food or a way of eating that has a lower amount of fat, calories, carbs or sugar.

Why are these problematic?

- These comments promote stress & anxiety around food when those in recovery are working towards a more relaxed relationship with food decisions.
- This is, at the core, confusing weight and health. Separating the two is paramount as they are not medically and scientifically as intertwined as our society mistakes them to be.
- Health isn't the same for everyone. Food affects folks differently and what is healthy for one may not be healthy for another.

What to say instead:

- If you're speaking about what you're in the mood for, label foods by name. Ex: "I'm super in the mood for pizza/a salad with steak/pasta and cheese/lots of colorful foods."
- Use non-judgemental language and "I" statements, where you aren't assuming that your choices apply to everyone.
- Ex: "Gluten tends to give me a stomach ache." vs. "Gluten is so bad for you. It makes you bloat."

Using the following terms with an implied negative connotation, whether about self or others:

Fat, chubby, heavy, heavysset, large, huge, big, thin, tiny, small, "too ____", obese

Why are these problematic?

Being evaluated on the basis of size is a majorly stress inducing experience. Judgmentally referring to someone or yourself as thin or fat is inherently fat phobic, and creates an environment where disordered eating is inevitable. I underline the word negative because these descriptors are not inherently negative. If someone self-identifies with any of the above labels and clearly does not feel triggered by the label, it may be appropriate to use.

What to say instead:

This is another great opportunity to ask yourself if something needs to be said and what your goal is in saying it. Remember, although comments can be meant from a "loving place", most of the time they won't have the effect you are hoping for.

Body Comparison Comments

- "Their body is so much better than mine."
- "I wish I had their thigh gap."
- "Don't you hate how skinny they are."
- "That body can't be healthy."
- "They looks like they never eat."
- "It looks like they gained a lot of weight."
- "I wonder if they're eating."
- "I don't fit into my pants anymore I lost so much weight."

Why are these problematic?

Weight as a status indicator is at the root of fat phobia, and is the impetus for most who pursue disordered eating as a means to try and achieve weight-loss. When we compare bodies in this way, we make someone inherently "better" than someone else. This creates social ranking that is detrimental to everyone, even those that experience "thin privilege", as they live with fat phobia that may lead to disordered eating.

What to say instead:

Body positive, weight-neutral compliments:

"I love their hair it's so shiny"

"I would love to be able to run 5 miles like them"

"Their skin is amazing!"

Exercise-Related Comments

- "I need to walk/run/work off this meal"
- Earning your food with exercise
- "You deserve it you worked out today."

Why are these problematic?

Using exercise as weight control is a common symptom of disordered eating. Those in recovery are working to view exercise as a neutral, pleasurable activity unassociated with weight control.

When we link exercise to food and weight and talk about compensatory behaviors, we're encouraging this association that breeds disordered eating and compulsive thoughts around food and body.

What to say instead:

Although suggesting to a friend that you go to a workout class to "work off" your brunch may seem innocuous to you (and I would argue it isn't), it can send someone else spiraling into thoughts of things like negative body image and calorie counting.

Trying talking about movement from an intuitive place and what may feel good, like "a run may feel really good this morning" or "I think my body is more in the mood for something gentle like a walk or some light stretching" is great.

Avoid General comments about Weight-loss and Dieting

By now I think you can understand the danger in those topics.

Dear Reader,

I hope this guide has provided you with some helpful tools for supporting yourself or others through recovery. If you have any comments or questions, don't hesitate to reach out to me via Instagram or Email, outlined below.

All my love,

Natalie

And...

If you or someone you know is struggling with diet and binge cycling, please reach out to **Natalie@nataliezises.com** and I'll be glad to support you further.

You can follow me or DM on Instagram **@nataliezises**

You can hear me on the "**Love, Your Body**" **Podcast** on iTunes or Spotify

Additional Resources

Check out the books:

Anti Diet, by Christy Harrison

Body Respect, by Linda Bacon

Intuitive Eating, by Elyse Resche & Evelyn
Tribole

Health At Every Size Information:

www.sizediversityandhealth.org