

Johnston Middle School
Johnston, Iowa

Dear Carolyn Mackler,

A nagging father, psychologist mother, and two perfect siblings. This may be what you call a “perfect” family. I think in every person’s life, they feel like they don’t belong.

There was a point in my life where I felt a little like Virginia. My father was going through this phase where he would comment on almost everything I did. Mainly concerning my eating habits and if I’d taken a walk yet. He also seemed to like mentioning how he walked three miles a day and sometimes he doesn’t even eat on Saturdays. This, of course, wasn’t a great boost or anything for me and it made me feel almost like a failure because he seemed disappointed with my choices.

My father wasn’t the only person in my family that made me feel a little worse than normal. My brother is now a senior in high school. He is overweight, but he is still one of the most popular kids in his school. He always has a joke and he seems to be just perfect. He can handle my father’s constant nagging, which I’ve always had trouble with.

Sometimes, early on Saturdays, before I’m awake, I’ll hear my parents and my brother and they’re laughing and they sound all happy, then I go down and I always seem to say or do something that changes the mood. I feel bad because of it, so, sometimes I don’t go down until later.

Living with a constant critic and perfect brother weren’t my biggest problems. I’ve been overweight my whole life, (as you might have gotten the jist of from my last paragraph). I was a big baby, almost 11 lbs. I grew up and stayed big. It’s not like I haven’t tried loosing weight. I’ve tried, and failed, many things, so here I am. A bigger-than-average 14 year old who wears 2x’s and size 18 pants. I’ve gotten used to this and all the comes with being overweight. The looks, pointing fingers, and the occasional putdown. After living with this for 14 years, I have also sort-of created a fat girl code of conduct.

My rules are as follows:

1. Stop fooling yourself, this boy does not like you.
2. Face it, you are not that pretty.
3. Shorts are not allowed in public.
4. No sleeves above the elbows.
5. Try and wear a sweatshirt, it hides your fat.

As you can see my guidelines are pretty strict and until I read your book I was doing good at following them.

This code for myself was already created when I read your book. I didn't call it the fat girl code of conduct, I just had them in my mind and subconsciously followed them.

As I read your book, though, and Virginia experienced so many things, good and bad, I started to think about my rules and how restricting they were. At the end of the book when Virginia kissed Froggy in public, it was just what I needed. I have since then revised my rules and now they are as follows:

1. go ahead, flirt with him, he might like you.
2. You may be big, but there are some thin girls that aren't as pretty as you.
3. Shorts are okay in public, but only if they're comfortable.
4. Only wear sleeves as high as your comfortable with.
5. Wearing different tops might actually make you look thinner.

My guidelines weren't the only that changed after I read your book. My views on my father's constant nagging and my brother's perfectness were influenced as well. Now whenever my dad says something to me I just take it and then think about it and consider what he said, instead of just getting mad or sad. I talk to my brother now about kids at school, how to talk to guys, and other things he's good at.

Your book helped me realize that being big is okay. Also, that there are boys out there that aren't totally mean or shallow. It opened my eyes and taught me to really start enjoying my life.

Yours truly,

Kelsey D. Bowen