From One Teen to Another: How to Accept Your Imperfections

By Amanda Temple
Chicago Tribune

After years of listening to everyone else call her Lardo, Chubbo and Wide Load, Candice D., 13, of New York City decided to join in the chorus of fat calls--in a big way. "Hi, my name is Candice and I'm fat" is how she put it, and it wasn't just for the pages of her journal or in an anonymous post on some Web site. Nope, Candice admits to dreaming about Frito Lays and blubbering in class in a new book, "No Body's Perfect" (Scholastic).

Candice is one of nearly 70 teen contributors who owns up to and confronts issues most kids barely want to discuss with their best friends. But in "No Body's Perfect," they take the trials of teenage self-image out in the open. They reveal their battles with bulimia, lash out at our look-obsessed culture, admit fears of being left out, celebrate unstylish pants and large noses, and look demons like anorexia and self-cutting right in the eye. And they do it without the sentimental, preachy, "it's just a phase" self-help lectures adults tend to give.

"The last person a teenager wants to get advice from is an adult, especially advice about something so personal as body image," says author Kimberly Kirberger, who, oddly enough, seems to be making a living dispensing just those kinds of words of wisdom to teens. She's the co-author of the "Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul" series of books and the president of Inspiration and Motivation for Teens Inc. (www.iam4teens.com).

So if Kirberger doesn't think kids will listen to adults, how is she getting her message across? With the help of teens such as Candice and Sara G., who in "No Body's Perfect" shares a goodbye letter to her mother, written a year after her mom's death.

After "Chicken Soup," Kirberger got hundreds of e-mails and letters from girls pumped to tell their own stories. And she got the makings of another book.
But why are kids willing to go public with something so personal? "I'd just like someone to identify with my words or just be impassioned to live their life to the fullest," says Sara.

"When I read through the book," she adds, "I realized that the writers are people just like me. The message is very powerful because people like those sharing their stories could be inside the walls of my high school."

And inside those high-school walls is exactly where Kirberger would like her book--and the honest dialogue it prompts--to be. In the book and on her Web site, she urges teens to set up their own "No Body's Perfect" discussion groups.