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PHOTO PROVIDED

Author Rosalind Wiseman will speak about fostering positive body images in children.

Body Language

In a society that emphasizes a “thin ideal,” eating disorders have become all too common. There are approximately 11 million sufferers in this country and 50 percent of us know someone with an eating problem, according to Dr. Steven Crawford, associate director of the Center for Eating Disorders at Sheppard Pratt.

Sheppard Pratt will kick off this year’s National Eating Disorders Awareness Week with Rosalind Wiseman, a parenting educator and author of the best-selling “Queen Bees And Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends And Other Realities of Adolescence” (Three Rivers Press).

Ms. Wiseman, whose book was the basis for the film “Mean Girls,” will speak at Sheppard Pratt in Towson this Sunday, Feb. 21, from 1-3 p.m.

“We live in a culture that has lots of messages on unhealthy eating habits,” Ms. Wiseman, who lives in Washington, D.C., told the BALTIMORE JEWISH TIMES. “We get two opposing messages — be skinny and eat healthy. It’s hard for girls in our culture to not be affected.”

Parents often play a role in how their children view weight and body image, Ms. Wiseman said. She suggested that mothers educate their daughters about negative body images in American culture without forcing the message.

Parents should also be cognizant of bullying at school related to body image, she said. Unfortunately, Ms. Wiseman said children are often less likely to talk to parents about bullying that is related to physicality. Parents should try to figure out what is happening by opening the door to conversation and letting their child know they are available, and then “just leave it. Don’t expect the child will talk right then,” she said.

Ms. Wiseman noted that Jewish girls, like those in other ethnic groups, carry their own particular body image issues — especially in the culture of *b’nai mitzvah* where preteen girls often dress in styles meant for older adolescents.

“As Jews, we often feel we are supposed to be liberal,” she said. “But we shouldn’t confuse being liberal with permissiveness.”

Ms. Wiseman’s talk is free, but pre-registration is required. To register, call Iris Fisher at 410-938-3157 or e-mail her at ifisher@sheppardpratt.org.