

Messages about body image

Learning objective

Students explore different messages they get from a range of sources about ideal bodies, and the impact these messages have on their own body image.

Take Home Messages

- we are all different physically (just as we are different in many other ways)
- we each naturally have a certain body type, and that is OK
- body type (build) is largely hereditary
- physical fitness and healthy eating are factors that are within our control
- our number one priority should be to stay healthy
- change is unavoidable and is OK
- we need to affirm others for who they are and not how they look. This is the first step in respect. Showing respect for others will help earn their respect for you.

Materials

- Student Activity Sheet: Media and body image [one per group]

Before You Get Started

- Read the background notes on [Body image](#).
- Be mindful of the feelings of any students in your class who may be under or overweight and the impact that discussions about body image may have on them.
- Try to ensure that posters in your classroom display models with a range of body types.
- Collect a range of suitable food advertisements/music videos showing stereotypical ideal male and female body types for the small group activity.

Learning Activities

Whole Class

Students explore the definition of body image and factors that affect it and recognise that we are all different physically. The aspects of development that they have little control over are discussed.

1. Explain that body image refers to how you see yourself, how you feel about the way you look and what you think other people might think about how you look. Explore this idea until you are sure students understand it.
2. Conduct a sharing circle using a small, soft ball and the following questions:
 - Name one way your family can affect your body image in a positive/negative way.
 - Name a way your friends can affect your body image in a positive/negative way.
 - Say one positive thing about the person to your left.
 - Name one thing about your body that you feel good about and why.
 - Name one singer or actor who has made you compare your body to his/hers.
 - Name how you might feel if you came to school on free dress day in your school uniform?
 - Name how you might feel if everyone in your group was wearing a certain type of wristband and you didn't have one.
 - Name a crazy diet that you have heard of.
 - What is your favourite healthy food?

- What is your favourite way to exercise?
3. Have students record their own definition of body image and draw a [mind map](#) of where they might get their messages about their own body image.

Ask:

- In what ways are we different to each other? (e.g. height weight, complexion, eye colour, likes/dislikes, abilities)
 - What are some things we can change through effort, by studying or practising? (e.g. sporting skills, musical skills)
 - What are some things we can't change about ourselves? (e.g. height, eye colour)
 - What are some things about ourselves that will change over time whether we like it or not? (e.g. height and weight will change as we grow, interests change as we mature)
4. Have each student write down three things he/she is good at and share them with a partner. Stress that a person's strengths and weaknesses define them as an individual and that one thing that makes the world interesting is that we all have these unique qualities. Explain that, as with other traits, each of us grows, develops and matures at a different rate. Rapid changes in height, weight and weight distribution;

In girls:

- Begins earlier than in boys.
- Usually begins between 10.5 and 11.5 years (but may be as early as 8 or 9 and as late as 12 or older).
- Full physical development is usually reached by 15.5 years.

In boys:

- Usually begins between 11 and 13.5 years.
- Full physical development is usually reached by age 16 or 17.
- Often accompanied by an increase in muscles and strength.
- Often accompanied by an increase in appetite.

5. Ask:

- Do you feel like you have ever been picked on or teased about qualities (either physical or otherwise) that are unique to you? How did you feel?
 - How could others change their approach to you to make the situation better?
 - What did you do to cope with your feelings about the situation?
 - Have you ever picked on others over some trait that is unique to them?
 - If so, how did the person you picked on respond?
 - If you had the situation to do over again, what would you do differently?
6. Stress that we are all different in many ways, including physically. Some of these differences are within our power to influence while others are out of our control. Stress that physical fitness and healthy eating are factors that are within our control that can help change our body shape. Each of us should focus on being the best we can be and show respect toward others.

Independent or Small Group

Students examine the ideal body type presented in the mass media and use their health literacy skills to deflate these myths.

1. Divide students into small groups and give each group two ads from a recent issue of a popular magazine or access to two YouTube music videos that portray unrealistic body images of males and females.

- Give each group one copy of the Student Activity Sheet: Media and body image. Ask each group to discuss and answer the questions about their advertisement or music video. Model the activity first using an ad to demonstrate the health literacy skills required.
- Ask one representative from each group to briefly present their conclusions about one or both of the ads/music videos critiqued by their group. Make tallies of the responses to each question.

Likely responses are:

Questions 1 and 2: Most models appear either normal weight or thin (rarely overweight or other than tall and lean for women or tall and muscular for men).

Question 3: Often the product and the body type of models are in conflict (i.e., slim people are eating unhealthy food)

Question 4: Advertisers/music video producers want people to think models look good naturally, however, most models rely on heavy makeup and/or computer-enhanced photography to look the way they do.

Question 5: Most often models appear to be having fun while using the product/promoting the song.

2. Ask:

- What messages do magazines, TV, internet advertisements, music videos, etc. send to young people about women's and men's bodies? (Possible responses may include; it's not okay to be overweight (or even to have a large body frame); it is not okay to be shorter or have a stocky build; slim people are the norm; there is an ideal body type (tall and thin for women and lean, muscular, athletic for men); if you want to have fun, achieving the ideal body type should be a goal)
- If we believed these messages, how might we think about our bodies that would not be healthy?
- It's important to like our bodies. What can we do or say to ourselves when we get negative messages from the media and others about our bodies? (e.g. turn off TV shows/ don't read mags that portray 'perfect' unattainable images; avoid people who tell us how we should look; wear clothes that we like, not what we think others will like; talk to our parents about what they looked like at your age)
- What could the media do to make sure young people had a more realistic and healthy idea of women's and men's bodies?

3. On a blank sheet of paper, have students draw a mirror. They then imagine that they are their own best friend. Ask: What would your best friend say are the positive qualities of your body? List these inside the mirror.

3-2-1 Reflection

1. Have students complete the following questions individually. Give examples for each first.
 - What messages might you get from your friends that would make you feel okay/not feel okay about your body?
 - What messages might you get from your family that would make you feel okay/not feel okay about your body?

- What messages might you get from your coaches that would make you feel okay/not feel okay about your body?
 - What can you remind yourself so that you only let the positive messages from other people influence how you think about your body?
2. On the other side of the mirror, have students write a message that will remind them to only let the positive messages from other people influence how they think about their body.