



your body matters



**Teacher Notes K: Body Image, Self-esteem
and the Media**

Nourishing Body & Mind for a Healthy Life

A Primary Health and Wellbeing Curriculum Pack

Revised Version 2023

Teacher Notes K: Body Image, Self-esteem and the Media

Associated lesson plans		
Primary Stage	Lesson	Title
6	6.5	Body Image, Self-Esteem and the Media
Useful websites / additional resources	<p>www.childline.org.uk/ <i>Childline UK: Information on Body image</i></p> <p>www.b-eat.co.uk <i>Provides helplines, online support and a network of UK-wide self-help groups to help young people in the UK beat their eating disorders.</i></p> <p>www.youngscot.org/ <i>Provides information on girls and boys body changes.</i></p> <p>https://peacepathway.org/ <i>PEACE Pathway for eating disorders and autism developed from clinical experience.</i></p> <p>https://www.thepineshighland.com/food-mood-behaviour-films <i>Food mood and behaviour films.</i></p>	

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What is body image?

“Body image is how we think and feel about ourselves physically, and how we believe others see us”- Young Minds (2023)

Body image is how you see yourself when you look in the mirror or when you picture yourself in your mind. It encompasses what you believe about your own appearance, how you feel about your body, including your height, shape and weight. Body image plays a huge role in modern society and is undeniably linked to an individual's self-esteem. People with high self-esteem usually know themselves well, they are realistic, feel more in control of their lives and can recognise their own strengths and weaknesses. Having a positive body image means that an individual feels comfortable and happy with the way they perceive their own body including their physical appearance and attractiveness to others. To have a negative body image usually means that an individual feels uncomfortable, awkward or has a distorted and inaccurate perception about the way they look and feel in their own body. Someone who experiences a negative body image can feel self-conscious about their body shape or can be ashamed of a particular aspect.

How do we develop a negative body image

There is an ever-increasing body of research highlighting the view that children and young people are developing negative body images at a younger age and these numbers seem to be constantly increasing. Many specialists in this field believe that the media and the use of filters and or editing software to alter appearances play an important part as a particular body stereotypes are often at the forefront of media platforms like Tik Tok, Instagram and Facebook and are ever-changing (i.e., tall, thin, muscular, curvy, smooth skin, no body hair etc.). As children and young people are becoming hyper aware of celebrities and media images, there are more opportunities for comparisons to be made which are not realistic to everyday lifestyles. The consequences of this can result in more children and young people having a negative body image.

However, the media is only one influence surrounding this concept, but when combined with a wider range of emotional, psychological and social factors, the issues surrounding body image increase resulting in a negative effect. These include:

1. Personal perception of themselves and how they are perceived by others.
2. The need for acceptance from others and comparing themselves to how other people look.
3. Pressured relationships from home, with friends/peers or at school which result in a young person questioning how they see themselves.
4. Negative comments about eating patterns or habits.
5. Constant exposure of others comparing and self-criticising their bodies or the way they look.

6. Exposure to healthy messages regarding diet and physical activity.
7. Media influences (including social media).

When discussing body image with children and young people, especially those who are near puberty, it is important to remember the wider variety of experiences and influences that they will be presented with in their everyday lives and what emotions they may be faced with during this time.

It is also important that we consider the relationship between eating, body image and self-esteem for neurodiverse children. We should be mindful of the language used and the challenges that a neurodiverse child may face around food and eating such as; sensory issues, cognitive aspects (i.e., restrictive or routine eating), emotional aspects (i.e., predictability) and social aspects (i.e., large gatherings). By labelling some foods as “healthy” and “unhealthy” in lessons and discussions, we can confuse autistic individuals or those with a learning disability. It is important to be clear that we eat different foods for all types of reasons.

Body image and Self-esteem

As body image and self-esteem go hand in hand it is important to remember that to effectively improve a young person’s body image, we should aim to boost their self-esteem. Developing healthier attitudes allows children and young people to explore aspects of growing up such as developing good friendships, becoming more independent and challenging themselves physically and mentally which will result in increased self-esteem and self-belief.

Children and young people gain perceptions about their own values and worth through their environmental and social experiences, including the responses of the significant people in their lives e.g., parents, carers, teachers and peers.



Tips for improving Body Image and Self-Esteem

1. Recognise that your body is your own, no matter what shape or size it comes in. Encourage children and young people to focus on staying strong, keeping healthy and identifying positive things they can personally do to make them happy. It is important to identify different body shapes, sizes and abilities and what it means for your body to be healthy. For example, our bodies might allow us to walk to school, or they might help us get ready for school in the morning, they might help us eat our meals or play games with our friends. All bodies will be able to do different things using different body parts. It is important to identify strengths and celebrate successes.
2. Humans, are all unique and original. Children need to discover that everyone is different: there are things they cannot change but must accept. things like height or shoe size. It is also important to highlight that different bodies will have different abilities. Children who use wheelchairs for example, can be as healthy and strong as a child who does not, but we recognise that wheelchair users may face other challenges because we live in an environment that prioritises able-bodied people. Acknowledging and appreciating our body's ability to help us move and complete day-to-day tasks and activities can help to build positive body image and self-esteem.
3. If there are things about yourself that you want to change and can, do this by making small, short-term, realistic goals for yourself. Small changes to health behaviors like exercising, eating a balanced diet or getting outside for 30 mins each day can have a positive impact on a person's health and appearance over time. Setting personal goals allows for progress to be tracked until it is complete. Meeting personal challenges is a great way of boosting self-confidence and self-esteem. It's important to find the best thing that works for you to keep fit and healthy, for example, finding physical activities or sports that you enjoy will encourage you to stay active. Exploring healthy foods you like the taste of, that help fuel your body for the activities you enjoy.
4. When you hear negative comments coming from within, try to think about how you would talk to a friend if they were going through something similar, or tell yourself that although you might not like how you look today, you accept your body and feel gratitude about all the great things it helps you do.
5. If you see a lot of images on social media that make you feel negative thoughts about your own body, it can be helpful to unfollow the pages sharing those images or hiding them from your feed, this means you won't see them every time you use the social media platform. If you see an advert in a magazine, on TV or online showing an unhealthy body image as aspirational, you can complain to the Advertising Standards Authority.

Encouragement should be given to children to appreciate each other for more than just how they look. As our bodies are complex and constantly changing, we should all try to focus on what is unique and interesting about ourselves and each other. Our bodies help us move and to complete day-to-day task and activities

(i.e., getting dressed in the morning, playing with friends, getting to school), so it is important to look after ourselves and appreciate what our bodies do for us.

Positive media influences

The media plays a variety of different roles in the daily lives of children and young people. Although in some instances, the influence of the media can be deemed negative, it does have several useful and positive objectives. Ikeda and Naworski (1992) suggested that there were four settings in which the media can have a positive influence on self-esteem.

A sense of connectedness	A sense of uniqueness
The media allows children and young people a feeling of togetherness and allows them to have strong links with people in the world around them, which may provide them with a sense of security and belonging.	This enables children and young people to accept the way they look and to be confident and happy with the fact that they are a little different from everyone else.
A sense of power	A sense of role models
Encouraging children and young people to have a positive body image will allow them to feel capable, strong and in control of their own lives.	Role models represent the principles and values children and young people need to help them make sense of the world and develop their own self-worth and responsibility. Some children and young people, such as those who are overweight or who are living with a disability, may find it difficult to identify appropriate role models. Resources and discussion materials should be taken from a wide variety of sources which represents abilities, cultures, sizes and gender to allow children and young people to identify with their own particular role models.

Children and young people should be involved in discussions about the mixed messages directed by the media to equip them with skills to make their own informed choices and decisions which will not hinder their self-esteem or the positive way they feel about their body.

Social media

Most children and young people now grow up in a world where their 'online' and 'offline' lives are essentially seamless. Social media can be a great way for people to engage and stay connected with peers and become a forum to seek support and information. However, it can also add pressure to everyday lives with imbalanced and filtered images and perceptions of people's lives. This can influence people's perceptions of themselves, their body image and self-esteem by creating an image of how we 'should' look. Building media literacy and encouraging children and young people to be critical of the images they see in the media (i.e. tv, film, ads and social media) can help to build a positive body image, increase self-esteem and build skills to navigate the pressures and images portrayed by the media and to explore ways to manage time spent online to support wellbeing.

Media literacy enables people to have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to make full use of the opportunities presented both by traditional and by new communications services. Media literacy also helps people to manage content and communications and protect themselves and their families from the potential risks associated with using these services.

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