

HEALTHY BODIES, HEALTHY MINDS

# *A Tool for Every Educator*









## Topics include:

- ◆ Self-Esteem & Body Image
- ◆ Weight
- ◆ Physical Activity
- ◆ Healthy Eating
- ◆ Eating Disorders
- ◆ Media Literacy
- ◆ Healthy School Environments

Revised 2019 Edition



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	Teaching	Effective ways of teaching this topic
	Role Modeling	Tips on how to be a good role model
	Conundrums	Tips on how to deal with different challenges
	Key Takeaways	Summary of main tips to remember for this topic
	Focus On	Main concepts to focus on
	Resources	Links to more resources and curriculum supports

## Introduction:

According to the Ministry of Education, “teachers can have a decisive influence on students by modeling the behaviours, values, and skills that are needed to develop and sustain healthy relationships and by taking advantage of ‘teachable moments’ to address immediate relationship issues that may arise among students”.<sup>1</sup> Teachers play a key role in shaping students’ healthy development and living skills, by using a variety of teaching strategies.<sup>2</sup> The importance of getting to know your students’ individual strengths and talents and providing positive encouragement to help them grow is integral to a child’s resiliency. The question remains, what are the things we do that influence students, either positively or negatively? It is not always clear what we should be saying or doing.

This guide, along with the educator training, will allow you to incorporate a Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds (HBHM) approach in the classroom and your whole school environment. This will positively impact the body image, self-esteem and overall mental and physical health of your students. According to the National Eating

Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC), more than half of children report being involved in appearance-based bullying. HBHM is a philosophy the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit developed to promote health for all community members. It places emphasis on health-promoting behaviours for overall health, such as feeling good and having energy to do the things we enjoy doing, instead of focusing on these behaviours for weight-based reasons. It focuses on three key topics: healthy balanced eating, healthy active living, and mental well-being. It uses a strengths-based approach to provide education on these topics and includes strategies for role modeling in a positive way and creating supportive environments that enable these behaviours.

We can have more impact on our children and youth if we use multiple strategies and common messages that can be reinforced by different people in different environments. Please see our [Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Infographic](#) and the following three Fact Sheets for some common messages.

- [Mental Well-Being Fact Sheet](#)
- [Healthy Eating Fact Sheet](#)
- [Physical Activity Fact Sheet](#)





# SELF-ESTEEM & BODY IMAGE

For more information on creating a strength-based classroom or school to foster resiliency in students visit the [Alberta Mentors website](#).

The following one-page tools have been created for parents or other community leaders working with children and youth.

- [A Tool for Parenting Children](#)
- [A Tool for Parenting Teens](#)
- [A Tool for Working with Children and Teens](#)

## *Q: What is self-esteem?*

Self-esteem is the value you place on yourself. It is the image you have of yourself, measured against what you think you should be with regard to your talents, skills, intellect, social skills, physical abilities and appearance.

High self-esteem is when you measure up to your own expectations. For example, you feel accepted, energized and competent. Low self-esteem occurs when you do not measure up to your expectations. For example, you feel rejected or depleted. It is normal for self-esteem to fluctuate throughout life, with adolescence being one of the most fragile times.

By taking the focus away from appearance, students are free to become the “best version of themselves, able to be appreciated for who they are regardless of their appearance, and empowered to respect and celebrate the diversity they see around them.”<sup>3</sup>

Children and teenagers often equate self-esteem with appearance and tend to compare themselves to their peers. Teachers can help promote their students’ self-esteem by taking the focus away from appearance, and helping to develop competencies in a variety of areas, including: education, work, sports, personal interests and relationships.

## *Q: What is a healthy body image?*

Body image refers to a person’s belief, thoughts and attitudes towards their body. It contributes to one’s self esteem. It includes how you feel about your physical features (e.g., height, facial features, colour, physical maturation) and abilities (e.g., what your body can do).<sup>4</sup>

A healthy body image means feeling comfortable in your body; you know how to take care of yourself and you feel good in your body. Positive body image is linked to good self-esteem, and function together to build students’ confidence and resiliency.

A student’s body image and self-esteem can be influenced by many factors including:

- Media/Society
- Teachers
- Parents
- Friends
- Physical environment
- Social environment (school climate)



### Teaching:

*Q: How can I help students build their self-esteem?*

Regardless of which subject you teach, it is important to work through activities with students that help them explore their positive, non-appearance related qualities in themselves and others. Encourage students to recognize and verbalize these positive attributes. Having this as a normal, everyday part of class will build self-esteem, resiliency and valuable social skills. Here are some activities you may wish to try in your classroom:

- Ask students to list “5 things I like about myself”, “5 things I can do well”, “3 compliments I can give to myself”. Challenge them to list non-appearance related praises.
- Have students practice providing each other with positive feedback. Try having students tell a partner one great quality they have, perhaps starting with friends and then moving on to others once they are comfortable. This will help build positive habits and self-esteem in the students receiving the compliment. Challenge students to compliment others on qualities not related to appearance (see examples on the next page).
- Teach students how to kindly receive compliments, by acknowledging the compliment and thanking the person. Students should learn to accept compliments and not to reject, evade or make excuses, as this may imply that they are not deserving of the compliments.

*Q: How can I make students feel good about themselves and their bodies without focusing on appearance?*

It is important for students to understand that appearance is not a measure of their worth. “Rather than focusing on appearance, it is important for students to learn to value other qualities within themselves and their peers and to celebrate their real successes in life”.<sup>5</sup> These other qualities may include intellectual abilities, physical abilities, social skills, and interests. Helping students increase confidence in their unique talents and abilities reduces the emphasis they place on physical appearance.<sup>5</sup>





As a teacher, offer lots of praise and encouragement, which in turn helps students feel good about themselves. It is important to recognize the efforts put forth along the way, and not just the final result. Offering praise for trying and making improvements helps to motivate them to attempt new, more difficult tasks.<sup>7</sup> If you need to talk about an area where they struggle, or have done something wrong, talk first about their strengths, and what they are doing well.

When offering praise, focus on areas in which they excel. Be specific, so your students can see that you recognize their unique talents and are taking an interest in them as an individual.

Examples of things to compliment students on include:

- Neat, legible handwriting
- Leadership skills
- Manners (sharing, waiting one's turn)
- Movement skills (jumping, running, throwing)
- Creative skills (writing, art, musical ability)
- Kindness towards peers, adults, animals and the environment
- Appropriate use of humour
- Friendship
- Any improvements and efforts you notice in a student. For example, "Great job throwing the ball, I can tell that you've been practicing"



### Role Modeling:

*Q: How do the things I do and say affect students' body image and self-esteem?*

As a teacher, you act as a role model to your students. Your students are always watching and listening to what you say and do. What they observe has an impact on what students view as "normal". The goal is to make positive messages the norm, rather than negative messages.

Sometimes we compliment people on their body and appearance with the best of intentions, but this can have unintended negative consequences. If students hear adults express dissatisfaction with their bodies, they may think that being an adult means





being unhappy with your body. For example, if an adult states “you look great, you’ve lost weight”, students may equate looking great with weight loss. When they hear adults admiring or criticizing the bodies of others, they may copy this behaviour by comparing their own bodies to others, or by teasing others.<sup>4</sup> Students may also assume that adults will look at them and judge their bodies or appearance. Teachers and staff should avoid commenting on their own and other people’s appearances at school.

Teachers and staff members can be positive role models by demonstrating healthy eating behaviours, being active and displaying a positive body image.<sup>4</sup> They can make a conscious effort to role model healthy body image by being aware of their verbal and non-verbal behaviours in front of students.



### Conundrums:

*Q: How can I role model a positive body image when I don’t feel I have one?*

Research indicates that teachers can help students accept and love their own bodies.<sup>5</sup>

Start by examining your own beliefs and attitudes about body size, eating, physical activity and how you feel about yourself. Consider the language you use and the behaviours you role model.

Some questions you can ask yourself are:<sup>6</sup>

- ☐ Am I dissatisfied with my shape or size?
- ☐ Do I talk about body weight or shape?  
Who do I talk to? Who can overhear?
- ☐ Do I feel guilty when I eat certain foods?

- ☐ Am I trying different diets to lose weight? Do I talk about my diets?
- ☐ Do I see physical activity as a chore, or a way to lose weight?
- ☐ How many times have I heard, or said, “Oh, you have lost weight, you look wonderful!”?
- ☐ Do I feel I would be happier if I lost weight?
- ☐ Do I think that overweight people have made bad choices about what and how much they eat?
- ☐ Do I make comments about myself or others? (e.g., “I feel fat”, “she is nice and skinny”)

Don’t feel bad if you have answered “yes” to any of these questions. Unfortunately, in our society, these answers are the norm and can have a negative impact on your own body image and self-esteem. These feelings may unintentionally transfer to your students. Being aware of it is the first step to start to shift this norm.

Any effort you make to promote a healthy body image through positive health messaging (e.g., enjoying foods, engaging in fun physical activities) instead of problem-based messaging will have a positive impact. By role modeling and teaching students about healthy eating, physical activity and accepting their own bodies, you may find that your own body image changes in a positive manner as well.



### Key takeaways:

- Be a positive role model by showing healthy eating behaviours, being active and demonstrating a positive body image.<sup>4</sup>
- Offer lots of encouragement and praise to your students, focusing on their efforts, rather than results.
- Provide specific praise to your students that focuses on their unique talents and abilities rather than appearances.



### Focus on:

Making positive comments about accomplishments (e.g., learning a new activity or skill, accomplishing a goal).

Complimenting others on their good qualities and personality traits, rather than their appearance (e.g., creativity, humor, artistic skills).

Changing the subject or re-directing the conversation when the focus is on weight, shape, appearance or diet (e.g., ask what they are doing that weekend, discuss a shared interest).

Your overall health. Ideas include making healthy food choices, getting enough sleep, managing stress, learning something new, or maintaining or making improvements in your strength, endurance and flexibility, rather than focusing on weight loss/gain.

Sometimes, comments made about someone's body, physical activity or food choices can create negative feelings and behaviours, even when they are well intentioned. These comments can be difficult to respond to. See our **Clever Replies to Damaging Remarks** factsheet for examples of compliments, comments and responses.



### Resources:

- **Educator's section of the Health Unit website:** A list of curriculum resources, teaching materials and tools for teachers for all grades on a variety of health topics. Contact your **Public Health Nurse** for resources.
- **Triple P:** A positive parenting program that helps you explore solutions to normal every day parenting challenges.
- National Eating Disorders Information Centre (NEDIC) Resources: **Body Image and Self Esteem Backgrounder**, Promoting Positive Body-Image among Students: **Tip Sheet for Teachers**

# WEIGHT



## Teaching:

### *Q: What is considered a healthy body weight?*

There is no one body weight that is healthier than another. Healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some children may appear to be overweight and are healthy whereas some children may appear to be a normal weight and are not healthy. Children's and adolescents' weight and shape are influenced by several factors, including heredity and body changes during normal growth and development. Many youth compare their bodies to their peers and unrealistic media images, which can often lead to preoccupation and dissatisfaction with their weight and shape. Teach students that eating in a healthy balanced way, and being physically active, can help build a healthy body. This can help strengthen children's body image by taking the focus away from weight.

### *Q: How do I talk about physical activity and healthy eating for maintaining a healthy weight?*

It is best to avoid linking weight to healthy eating and physical activity. If the topic of weight is brought up in the classroom, re-frame or re-direct the discussion to talk about balanced eating and physical activity. Teachers should promote physical activity

and healthy eating as a means for physical and mental well-being and enjoyment rather than for weight manipulation.<sup>3</sup> When teaching about healthy eating, focus on the role of healthy eating in fueling and supporting body functions and mental wellbeing, along with enjoying a variety of foods. The goal of being active is to have a healthy, strong and flexible body, and to have fun being active with your friends and family. A healthy body will happen naturally if these key pieces are in place, so it is best to avoid discussing body weight altogether. Healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes, so the focus should be on health instead of weight.

### *Q: What is the best way to teach about different body types?*

Help students understand that they are individuals with unique characteristics, including their physical characteristics. Provide students with images of a variety of bodies of different shapes and sizes, including athletes with various disabilities. Put a title over the pictures that says "Healthy bodies



come in a variety of shapes and sizes”.<sup>4</sup> When teaching about genetics and heredity, tell students that all people are individuals. It is best to avoid teaching that specific ethnic backgrounds have particular body types. You can discuss physical traits and have students compare their own personal traits to their siblings, parents, grandparents and friends to find what is unique and what is similar.

A healthy person enjoys being active regularly, and enjoys a variety of foods to fuel their body, and appreciates that healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.



### Role Modeling:

*Q: How can school staff be sensitive to the topic of weight?*

Students learn how they feel about themselves from the people around them. Their perceptions are affected by the way you feel and talk about yourself and others. If students overhear teachers talking about weight or dieting, this can send the message to students that dieting and constant concern about weight are encouraged and part of normal behaviour. If a student overhears a conversation that starts with “You look great, you’ve lost some weight, haven’t you?” the student might get the message that losing weight will result in positive attention from others. Show students that weight is not important by not discussing it.

Talking about weight can become a habit. To break this habit, try making your school



a “Positive Body Talk/Self Talk” zone (e.g., environments free from language focused on weight, dieting, and appearance). Have staff try to change the conversation together, and support each other. The more you practice, the easier it gets. See our [Clever Replies to Damaging Remarks](#) factsheet for ideas on how to change the conversation.



### Conundrums:

*Q: What should I do if I have a student who is overweight?*

Avoid singling out students. All students should be encouraged to pay attention to their hunger and fullness cues, eat in a healthy balanced way, and participate in enjoyable physical activity. Weight and weight loss should not be discussed with students of any size. Children and adolescents with overweight and obesity should not be put on a diet or encouraged to lose weight.

Focusing on body weight (e.g., commenting on body shape or size, food choices or eating habits, and physical activity for weight loss) can have unintended negative consequences. These consequences may include: decreased physical activity, body image concerns and less healthy eating behaviours.<sup>8</sup>

***Q: What should I do if I hear weight-based teasing?***

Weight-based teasing is a form of bullying and harassment. This type of teasing can lead to depression, poor body image and self-esteem as well as cause weight obsession that can result in disordered eating.<sup>9</sup> Start by following your school's bullying prevention plan. If you hear weight-based teasing, discuss the comments with the students to help them realize why their behavior is harmful. Teachers should be able to examine their own biases to create an inclusive and respectful learning environment.<sup>1</sup> Try holding a classroom meeting to set expectations around teasing and bullying. Students can help create classroom policies and help work together to follow them.<sup>10</sup> For more information and tips to reduce weight bias in your classroom and school, go to [RUDD Centre for Food Policy & Obesity](#).

***Q: Should I weigh my students?***

No. Your students are still growing and the number on the scale does not provide valuable information, especially considering

the variation in body types and developmental stages from one student to another. Students will likely compare weights and begin to judge themselves and others based on the number on the scale. Talking about weight, or weighing students, may cause them to become preoccupied with weight and could result in unhealthy behaviours. Discourage comparisons of weight and height. Taking the focus away from weight is best. This weight focus can lead to weight-based teasing. According to RUDD, 92% of adolescents report that they witness their peers with overweight and obesity being teased at school.<sup>9</sup>

***Q: Should I calculate Body Mass Index (BMI) with students to see if my health education classes were effective?***

No. Many factors beyond your classes could influence a student's weight, so it is not appropriate to hold students or teachers accountable for BMI changes. Using BMI results to evaluate performance might bring attention to weight and increase stigma and harmful weight-related behaviours. Measure what you are teaching. Examples of more appropriate performance measures include: student knowledge, food and physical literacy and skills, and physical activity and sedentary behaviours.<sup>11</sup>

By calculating a student's BMI, teachers may inadvertently trigger a desire to be thinner, which could result in some dangerous and unhealthy behaviours to achieve this change in weight.<sup>12</sup> It is more meaningful to teach students that healthy people come in a variety of shapes and sizes.



### Key Takeaways:

- Reflect on your own values, biases and attitudes about weight, physical activity, food, dieting and appearances
- Create an environment where students of all body shapes and sizes are accepted
- It is best not to discuss weight or weight loss with students, even if you think they are overweight
- Make your school a “Positive Body/Self Talk” zone
- Healthy bodies come in all shapes and are not meant to look the same.
- Teach students that they are individuals with unique characteristics including their body types
- BMI is not a tool to be used with students



### Focus on:

Modifying activities to be inclusive of all skill levels without having the focus on any one child. It is important to keep all students moving.

Having all students set their own personal goals that they can work towards and feel accomplished.

Intervening when you observe any type of weight-based teasing, as you would with other types of teasing (e.g., race, gender).

Encouraging all students to eat well, be active and feel good about themselves. Healthy children come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Eating habits and activity levels will vary from student to student.



# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



## Teaching:

*Q: What is the best way to teach about physical activity?*

The **Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Children and Youth** outlines the importance of physical activity and the variety and time needed to benefit mental and physical health. Teachers should not promote physical activity as a way to lose weight. In fact, weight and weight loss should not be discussed with students. All students benefit from being active regardless of their body shape or size. All students should be encouraged to participate in enjoyable and sustainable physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle.<sup>1</sup>

Supporting and encouraging opportunities for unstructured play is an effective way to increase physical activity for children and youth.<sup>14</sup>

Building physical literacy in students is the best way to help them learn the confidence, skills and knowledge needed to be active. Provide opportunities to build fundamental movement skills (part of physical literacy) throughout the school day (e.g., hopping, balancing, running, throwing, catching) in a variety of different environments (e.g., in snow, on ice, in water, on grass, over rocks). These experiences will instill confidence, competence, increase activity levels, and help with learning and development.<sup>15</sup> Implement key physical literacy teaching strategies, and provide a variety of activities that students

enjoy. For ideas, check out this **physical literacy webinar**.

Take your students outside to learn and play actively. Students also move more when they go outside and, as an added bonus, being outdoors can increase physical activity levels and is an opportunity to learn about science and nature. Being outside in nature is also connected to improved mental wellbeing.

By keeping physical activity inclusive to all activity levels, modifying and changing up your games and avoiding winners and losers, it can be fun for everyone.

*Q: I have noticed my students spend a lot of time sitting and on their screens. How can I get them moving more and spending less time on screens, yet still learning?*

According to the **24-Hour Movement Guidelines**, children and youth are encouraged to live an active lifestyle with a daily balance of sleep, sedentary behaviours, and physical activities to support their healthy development. According to these guidelines, they should spend no more than 2 hours per day of recreational time using screens and avoid sitting for extended periods of time.<sup>16</sup>

For more information on activity, sedentary behaviours, sleep and screen guidelines see the **Physical Activity and Rest section of our website**.



Schools can plan screen-free challenges to encourage students to reduce their screen time and replace this time with other activities. Help them try a new activity, learn food skills to prepare meals, read a book and learn how to get a good night's sleep. Plan active games during snow days or when they are inside during cancelled recess. The Health Unit has materials to help schools plan screen-free challenges that include resources for parents on how to reduce screen time at home, create house rules, and improve balanced eating, physical activity and sleep for the whole family. See our website for our '[Pause to Play](#)' challenge resources to implement in your classroom or school.

In order to reduce extended periods of time spent sitting, implement regular breaks or movement into classroom activities. Consider taking students outside to learn. Being outside is a great fit break, as research has shown that people naturally move more when they are outside. Nature also has the added benefit of helping to calm and focus the brain, increasing overall mental wellbeing. These activity breaks can enhance the classroom environment by improving student attention, behaviour, retention and learning, so it is worth the time for everyone.

***Q: How can I use physical activity to promote a healthy body image?***

By engaging students in physical activity, you can put the focus on what their bodies can do rather than what their bodies look like. Teaching students the joy of being active and

to pay attention to how their bodies feel and perform, will help to promote a positive body image.<sup>17</sup> Regular physical activity also has a positive impact on our mental wellbeing. Building physical literacy in students also builds their confidence as they start to see improvements and gain positive experiences while being active. Teachers can teach students that no matter their age, height, weight, natural abilities or skills, they need to be physically active to be healthy and strong.<sup>4</sup> Students may feel better about their bodies after physical activity; especially if they can see what their bodies can do (e.g., personal improvements in strength, endurance, balance and coordination).<sup>4</sup> For more information go to [www.physicalliteracy.ca](http://www.physicalliteracy.ca).

***Q: Can inspirational images of healthy bodies help inspire students to be physically active?***

Thinspirational images (images of thin bodies) and Fitspirational images (images of fit or "ripped" bodies) that students post on an image board, online or at home are popular. People often see this as a way of inspiring themselves to make healthy choices. In fact, research has shown that it can have the opposite effect. It is best to discourage the use of these images as they create a focus on physical appearance and are often unrealistic goals. These images are very prevalent in the media. For ideas on how to be critical of what we see and hear in the media, see our [Media Literacy section](#) in this document.



### Role Modeling:

*Q: How can I role model active living?*

It is important for students to see adults incorporating physical activity into their day and to view this as a normal, fun and positive experience. Walking or cycling to school can be a great way to role model active living while also improving your mental well-being. If you are interested in promoting walking or cycling to school for your students, see our [website](#) for more information.



### Conundrums:

*Q: What do I do with a student who can't perform an activity?*

If a student is physically unable to perform an activity, avoid making this obvious. Try to modify activities to meet the individual needs and abilities of your students.<sup>1</sup> Plan for modifications before they start; each student can create their own personal goals based on their physical abilities. To increase self-esteem, give the student an achievable goal they can reach and feel good about and gradually modify the goal as they improve.

*Q: What if a student says they can't do an activity?*

Set up stations around a room or gym, where all students can be active at once. Allow students to modify the station for their own skill/



ability. Have them move through the stations, ensuring they have adequate time to try each activity without feeling rushed. This format helps to support a variety of fitness and movement skills, and keeps everyone moving without the fear of a big, intimidating audience. This will help students gradually build their confidence in their movement skills. [Call or email your school's Public Health Nurse](#) to book the Fitness Charts that can be used to create these different stations.

The following are some tips to consider when planning activities:

- Incorporate physical activity into the classroom whenever possible.
- Compliment students on their skills, abilities, effort and improvements.
- Modify games for the group; replace balls with rubber chickens or beach balls to make it appear fun rather than structured and competitive.

- Introduce variety, choice and non-traditional activities to suit all different interests and skills.
- Ask students what they like to do, and how they could modify the activities to suit different abilities and incorporate these ideas. Let students help create or lead the activities.
- Introduce individual and recreational activities such as walking, running, dance, yoga, hiking, weight lifting, gymnastics.
- Avoid taking away or giving physical activity as punishment.
- Avoid having team captains who choose teams as this can affect the self-esteem of those chosen last. There are easy ways to pick teams without creating this discomfort in the kids who most likely could benefit from more positive experiences with physical activity. For example, numbering students 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3.
- Try not to be too rigid about rules and how games need to be played, or getting stuck in the dodgeball rut. These activities can be competitive, and only suit the more athletic students. Also, elimination games have a tendency to eliminate the students that can benefit most from the the opportunity to build their skills. Your primary role is to foster enjoyment in those who already have it, and to help inspire it in those who don't.<sup>13</sup>
- For ideas on how to plan activities and be inclusive, see [Ophea's resources](#) to support your class.



## *Q: What if a student refuses to participate in gym class?*

Speak to the student privately and in a supportive manner to try to find out why they do not wish to participate. Work with the student to find a solution that enables them to rejoin the class. If it is because they don't want to change clothes or shower in front of other students, find a solution that enables the student to maintain their privacy but also to feel accepting of their body.



## **Key Takeaways:**

- Focus on what students bodies can do rather than what their bodies look like
- Physical activity should be promoted as part of a fun and healthy lifestyle, not as a way to lose weight
- Help students build their physical literacy. This is the foundation they need to be physically active for life



### ***Focus on:***

Encouraging all students to try activities, move to their ability, play and have fun.

Teaching students that the reason for being active is to help increase their self-esteem, physical activity level and overall health rather than to change the way their body looks (e.g., losing weight, bulking up).

Letting students see you being active at school (e.g., walking, running, biking) and enjoying it.

Joining students in gym class and Daily Physical Activity (DPA), showing that people of all ages, shapes and sizes can enjoy participating.

Intervening when you observe any type of weight-based teasing, as you would with other types of teasing (e.g., race, gender).

Talking positively about physical activity and what you enjoy about it (e.g., how you feel energized after a walk).



### **Resources:**

- [Health Unit Curriculum resources](#)
- [Health Unit Physical Activity and Rest information](#)

# HEALTHY EATING



## Teaching:

*Q: What is the best way to teach students about healthy eating?*

The best way to teach students about healthy, balanced eating is to focus on how food gives us the energy we need to help us learn, play, grow, keep our bodies working properly and have a positive effect on our mental wellbeing. Balanced eating also means eating when you are hungry and stopping when you are full. Eating regular meals and snacks throughout the day is healthy for children. Remember to avoid labelling foods as “good” or “bad” as this can contribute to body image and eating concerns. Try using the terms “everyday” and “sometimes” foods instead.

Focus on teaching students about food in a fun and informative way that inspires them to enjoy a variety of foods. Teaching about food skills can help to increase students’ ability and confidence in preparing a variety of foods. Teach about where our food comes from, how it looks (and tastes!) in its most simple form, and about eating a variety of foods such as colourful vegetables and fruit, whole grains and protein foods such as plant-based proteins, eggs, fish, lean meats, lower fat milk and fortified milk alternatives lower in added sugar. Choose water as the beverage of choice to quench thirst.

*Q: How should I teach about the role of food in preventing specific health conditions (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, etc.)?*

Focus on how enjoying “everyday” foods most often can help to keep our bodies and minds healthy and prevent some health conditions. “Everyday” foods are colourful vegetables and fruit, whole grains and protein foods such as

plant-based proteins, eggs, fish, lean meats, lower fat milk and fortified milk alternatives lower in added sugar. Choose water as the beverage of choice to quench thirst. Explain that a healthy eating pattern also includes enjoying “sometimes foods”, like pastries, cookies and chips in moderation and without guilt. Explain that some people choose to follow special diets for cultural or religious reasons, personal choice, or because of food allergies (e.g., celiac disease, peanut allergy).

Teaching about different types of diets may bring up the topic of “fad diets” (e.g., high protein, low carbohydrate, raw foods, cleanses). Explain to your students that these fad diets are often promoted by celebrities or others who are not nutrition experts. This is also an opportunity to explain that “eating pattern” is better than the word “diet” to describe the foods we choose to eat. A healthy eating pattern will never exclude entire food groups, unless there is a food allergy or specific health condition that requires avoidance of certain foods. Teach them to assess if an eating pattern is healthy





by looking at where the information is from. For example, is it from a credible source, like a registered dietitian or a website such as [Dietitians of Canada](#) or [Unlockfood.ca](#)? If not, the information may not be accurate.

### *Q: How should I teach about Canada's Food Guide?*

The new Canada's Food Guide was released in January 2019.

When teaching about Canada's Food Guide, it is best to focus on how eating a variety of foods from all three food categories (vegetables and fruit, protein foods, and whole grains) will help keep us healthy. [The Eat Well Plate Model](#) is a useful tool to teach about healthy food choices and our [Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Healthy Eating Factsheet](#) is also a great resource to support this.

### *Q: How should I teach students about calories and nutrients?*

When teaching, it is best to avoid focusing on calories. Provide a basic description explaining that the energy from the food and drinks we consume is measured in calories. The amount of calories in a food or drink does not determine if it is a healthy choice or not.

Teach students to enjoy a variety of foods, such as colourful vegetables and fruit, and protein foods such as plant-based proteins, eggs, fish, lean meats, lower fat milk and fortified milk alternatives lower in added sugar which give our bodies energy and the different nutrients we need to live, learn, grow, play and be healthy.<sup>5</sup> Choose water as the beverage of choice to quench thirst.



## Role Modeling:

### *Q: How do my eating habits at school influence my students?*

Teachers and other adult influencers within the school can positively influence students' food choices by role modeling positive eating habits.<sup>4</sup> When students see teachers enjoying healthier food and drink choices (also called “everyday foods”), they are more likely to choose these foods themselves. It is also important to enjoy a variety of foods in moderation and without guilt, including “sometimes foods”, like chips, chocolate bars, etc. Avoid talking about your own weight, or engaging in dieting or physical activity to lose weight. Instead, make positive comments about your own and others' personality traits, skills, abilities and accomplishments, which will encourage children to focus on the positive aspects of themselves and others.



## Conundrums:

### *Q: What do I do if a student brings unhealthy lunches and snacks?*

It is important not to comment (positively or negatively) on what a student has in their lunch, especially without knowing the context of why certain food items have been included. Students have varying levels of involvement in packing their own lunches and little influence on what foods their parents or caregivers are buying, or can afford to buy, particularly in the primary and

junior years. Drawing negative attention to a child's lunch can isolate them from their peers and negatively impact their self-esteem. It can also cause them to question the competence of their parent or caregiver to feed them properly.

We understand that educators may experience pressure from parents to encourage students to finish their lunch, or eat foods in a particular order (e.g., vegetables and fruit before eating a cookie), however, it is best not to comment on children's food or eating as this can get in the way of their learning to eat and enjoy a variety of foods.

Positive attention for children having 'healthier' items in their lunch can also have unintended consequences, as children may learn to eat certain foods in order to receive praise. Other children, not receiving positive attention for their lunch, may feel shame if they do not have 'healthier' choices available to them. It is also important not to comment on how much a child is eating (or not eating) from their lunch. Children and adults should follow their internal signals of hunger and fullness and not eat more or less as a result of external pressures.<sup>4</sup>

### *Q: Is it okay to reward students with food?*

While providing rewards to students can be an effective way to encourage positive behaviour, using food as a reward or withholding food as a punishment can lead to an unhealthy relationship with food. When food is used as a reward or punishment, children can develop a positive or negative association with these foods. Providing food as a reward during class time encourages students to eat as a reward rather than when they are hungry. This conflicts

with messaging about children eating in response to their hunger and fullness cues.

It is best to use non-food items as rewards such as pencils, erasers, or stickers. Outdoor playtime as a reward is also a great idea as it teaches students that physical activity is enjoyable and part of a healthy lifestyle.



### **Focus on:**

Keeping conversations about food neutral. Avoid labelling foods as "healthy" or "unhealthy" or "good" or "bad".

Encouraging students to eat what foods they are hungry for and to keep in mind that they won't have an opportunity to eat again until the next scheduled break time.

Enjoying a variety of foods at school. Enjoy all foods in moderation and without guilt.

Rewarding students using non-food items (e.g., using the teacher's desk for the day, getting a new pencil or eraser, a trip to the treasure box, first in line, helping teacher, etc.).



### **Resources:**

- [Health Unit Curriculum resources](#)
- [Health Unit Healthy Eating Information](#)
- [Food Insecurity in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark](#)



# EATING DISORDERS



## Teaching:

### *Q: Should I teach about eating disorders and their signs and symptoms?*

It is not recommended that you teach students about eating disorders and their signs and symptoms. This may be harmful and may glamourize disordered eating patterns. Instead, teach students about general health rather than the number on the scale. This can include education on: healthy eating, active living, self-acceptance, media literacy, healthy communication, positive relationships, problem solving, ways to cope with sexual, racial or other harassment and appearance-based teasing. Try to integrate these messages throughout the school year and within a variety of subjects.

### *Q: What approach can I use in the classroom to help prevent students from developing eating disorders?*

The approach used to support students with eating disorders is very different from the approach used to prevent eating disorders in the general school population. If you would like to prevent disordered eating within the school population, promotion and prevention efforts must take place on many levels. Some examples of this include:

- Contact your **Public Health Nurse** to set up a staff training on creating supportive environments for positive body image and self-esteem (e.g., examining their own beliefs, role modeling, teaching, and curriculum supports).
- Include weight-based stigmatization/teasing in bullying policies.

- Encourage and support “Positive Body/Self Talk” environments (e.g., environments free from language focused on weight, dieting, and appearance). This will help staff and students to be more aware of the messages they send about appearances and the impacts certain messages can have on self-esteem and body image (e.g., “You look great. Have you lost weight?”, “I was bad today. I ate birthday cake.”, “She looks fat in those pants.”).
- Create a classroom environment where students can practice being respectful of each other’s point of view, provide and receive positive feedback, listen and respect differences and challenge stereotypes.
- Create safe and comfortable spaces for students to enjoy eating together.
- Discourage “starve-a-thons” and weight loss challenges. Share that changes made to eating habits should be sustainable and enjoyable over the long term.
- Start a student club to empower adolescents to feel good about themselves, and to explore and appreciate everyone’s unique strengths and abilities as a means to increase self-esteem.
- Equip parents with ideas on how to promote positive self-esteem and body image, and healthy balanced eating and physical activity.
- Provide peer mentor programs to help students: have greater self-esteem, learn

leadership skills, build friendships, and develop problem-solving skills.

- Provide school staff with information on recognizing the signs of a student at risk of developing or having an eating disorder.<sup>5</sup>



## Conundrums:

*Q: What should I do if I suspect a student has an eating disorder?*

It is important that students receive the help and support they need if they have an eating disorder. People can, and do, recover from eating disorders, but professional help is almost always required. Eating disorders are a mental health as well as a physical health issue and the longer symptoms are denied or ignored, the more difficult recovery will be. It's important for those students and their families to seek help as soon as possible.

Some of the signs and symptoms of disordered eating include:

- Chaotic eating or eating without being conscious of hunger and fullness cues
- Using food to punish or soothe themselves
- Guilt, shame or secrecy about eating
- Excess concern about weight, shape and calories
- Feeling fat regardless of body size
- Feeling guilty about eating
- Strict avoidance of certain foods or unusual eating habits

- Noticeable weight loss
- Frequent weight fluctuation

Accessed from [NEDIC website](#) Feb 2018

If you suspect a student may have an eating disorder, it is important to speak to their parents, caregivers or guardians. Include the student if it is appropriate. Acknowledge that this is a difficult and delicate conversation; ensure you show empathy and support for the student and their family. Consider any cultural or social issues that may make it hard for the families to discuss issues. Your **Public Health Nurse** can provide information about resources in the community that parents may be able to access.



## Key Takeaways:

- It is best to avoid teaching about eating disorders as this can be harmful.
- If you suspect a student has an eating disorder, it is important to speak to their parents/caregivers and provide them with resources to support them.
- The approach used to support students with eating disorders is very different from the approach used to prevent eating disorders in the general school population.



### Focus on:

Teaching students about overall health rather than the number on the scale.

Including education on active living, self-acceptance, media literacy, problem solving, coping skills, etc.

Encouraging and supporting “Positive Body Talk” environments (e.g., environments free from language focused on weight, dieting and appearance). This will help staff and students to be more aware of the messages they send about appearances and the impacts certain messages can have on self-esteem and body image.

Rewarding students using non-food items (e.g., using the teacher’s desk for the day, getting a new pencil or eraser, a trip to the treasure box, first in line, helping teacher, etc.)

Explaining that healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes.



### Resources:

NEDIC - Promoting Positive Body-Images among Students: Tip Sheet for Teachers

NEDIC - Confronting Body-Based Harassment Tip Sheet for Teachers

NEDIC school curriculum *Beyond Images* \*It is not recommended that Grade 5 Lesson 2 be completed with students.

**Hopewell** offers mentoring and support groups based on the peer support model and has many links to local treatment providers

“**Checkered Flags – Everyone’s Responsibility**” is designed to assist professionals in responding effectively to the students that we all care about, to promote a collaborative approach within our community and to increase the level of awareness and access to effective supports and services.

# MEDIA LITERACY

## *Q: What is Media Literacy?*

“Media is one of the strongest social influences on body-image and self-esteem development in children and youth”.<sup>18</sup>

Students are bombarded with media messaging every day. In order to interpret these messages effectively, students need to learn and develop media literacy skills. Media literacy involves teaching people to critically analyze, understand and challenge the images and messages seen and heard in the media. In turn, negative images and messages are discredited, hopefully resulting in a reduction in their influence on body image. See the [Supporting Minds: An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’ Mental Health and Well-being](#) for more information.



## **Teaching:**

## *Q: How can I teach students about media and its influence?*

“Helping students to become media-savvy and aware of both overt and implicit media messages supports their development of a healthy body-image and positive self-esteem”.<sup>19</sup>

It is good to teach students that the physical images presented in the media are altered to appear flawless and that nobody looks that way naturally. You can teach students that shapes and sizes are altered, blemishes, freckles, lines



and wrinkles are edited out, and images can be completely generated to create the “look of the day”. The media sends the message that if you try hard enough, spend enough money and suffer enough, you can look the way you want which will make you happy.<sup>20</sup> Adults may understand this to be false, but it is not always evident to children and youth. By educating students on how the media enhances body features with props, makeup, lighting and computer techniques, they will be able to look at the media messages more critically and see how unrealistic and un-natural these images are.<sup>20</sup>

Empower students to challenge messages and advertisements they consume and create. It is important for students to remember to be true to themselves and their friends and to promote and publish what is real. Help students understand that it is okay, for example, to want to look good in selfies, but trying to look good all of the time, or as the only focus of social media activities, can get in the way

of other important things they might also want to promote, like having fun, focusing on achievements, and so on. Encourage students to use media to make a positive change in the world, by spreading positive body image messaging. They too can have a role in exposing consumerism and false appearance ideals.<sup>21</sup>

### *Q: How can I teach media literacy skills?*

“The media has a duty to be responsible and to show respect for all individuals. When media perpetuate stereotypes, they act neither responsibly nor respectfully”.<sup>22</sup> It is important to teach students to be critical of the messages they see and hear from various media sources. In doing so, they are able to identify that media images and texts are often manipulations of the truth in an effort to sell a product. “They will learn that it is pointless to compare themselves to images in the media because the images often promote appearance ideals in order to sell us products and services”.<sup>6</sup> Students can also learn to identify the purpose of the message (e.g., is it trying to sell something?), and be able to compare with messages they receive from trusted sources, such as parents and teachers.

Consider teaching the Three R’s of Responsible Media in order for students to decide whether media presentations are reliable, respectful, and representative.<sup>23</sup>

## Three Rs of Responsible Media

### 1. Reliable

- Can the information the media text conveys and the depictions the media text provides be relied upon?
- Does the media text state or make obvious its intent, purpose, and bias?
- Can the media text be trusted?

### 2. Respectful

- Does the media text treat its subject(s) and its readers/viewers/listeners/handlers with fairness, decency, and respect, even if it is critical or satirical?

### 3. Representative

- Does the media text offer an inclusive portrayal of its subjects? If not, does it explain why it doesn’t?



### Role Modeling:

### *Q: How can I role model positive media literacy?*

Many media images are not representative of the general population. They are often manipulated and altered to reflect unattainable appearance ideals. This can affect self-esteem and body image, not only in children and youth, but in adults as well. As a teacher and role model, you can help to promote positive media literacy by not reinforcing these appearance ideals. Be mindful of the messages you relay, both in

person and on social media. Sometimes, well-meaning messages, such as “You look great. Have you lost weight?”, can have unintended consequences for those who read or hear them. Instead, focus your messaging on your own skills and talents, achievements, interests, healthy eating and active living.

To show that you do not endorse the media messages and images that emphasize appearance ideals, consider the following:<sup>6</sup>

- Post only positive messages on social media
- Avoid editing or retouching your own photos
- Educate people on the image alterations that occur often in the media
- Avoid posting or sharing altered images
- Campaign against the use of retouched photos (start an online petition)
- Encourage others to follow in your lead!



### **Key Takeaways:**

- It is good to teach students to critique the messages they receive in the media
- Teach students that pictures of flawless models are edited to remove wrinkles, blemishes, etc.



### **Resources:**

- **NEDIC**  
Beyond Images:  
[Grade 6 Lesson 1](#)  
[Grade 6 Lesson 2](#)  
[Grade 6 Lesson 4](#)  
[Grade 8 Lesson 1](#)  
[Grade 8 Lesson 2](#)  
[Grade 8 Lesson 3](#)  
[Grade 8 Lesson 5](#)

Parents and teachers do make a difference! Elementary school children reported a significant increase in body esteem two weeks after a single lesson explaining how media use technology and fantasy to construct unrealistic and unhealthy beauty images. Talk with your students about the images, slogans, and messages they consume to help counteract unhealthy body images.<sup>19</sup>



# HEALTHY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

*How to promote a Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds environment within your school:*

## Physical Activity:

- Implement **DPA in the classroom** or school wide
- Implement regular opportunities to move
  - High Schools can implement this using Fit 2 Learn. Contact the **Health Unit** for more information
  - Elementary Schools can implement the **Playground Activity Leaders in Schools (P.A.L.S)** program
- Provide space inside the school for students to move and be active (including both planned activities and free play opportunities).
- Provide outdoor classrooms or outdoor opportunities for learning which will naturally encourage movement
- Provide bike parking at the school
- Work with your community on creating **safe and active routes to your school**
- Review your school rules/policies to find out if you can add rules/policies that will encourage physical activity, or modify or remove rules/policies that may be inhibiting activity

## Healthy Eating:

- Consider the foods and beverages available at your school. This might include food served during classroom

celebrations or fundraisers, at school events or tuck shops, in vending machines and through hot lunch programs.

- If planning school celebrations, consider the food and beverages being offered. The **BrightBites® “Reason to Celebrate”** badge can provide some ideas. Consider including fun physical activities in your event, like a dance off.
- For school fundraisers, try using non-food rewards or healthy foods. Refer to the **BrightBites® “Show Me The Money”** badge to help guide you. Try a physical activity fundraiser such as a dance off, **walk and wheel events**, or a **take me outside challenge**.
- School gardens are a great way to teach students about a variety of topics (e.g., science, history, math, nutrition and the environment). Refer to the **BrightBites® “Green Thumb”** badge for ideas to get started.
- For more information about **BrightBites®**, contact your **Public Health Nurse**.





## Mental Well-Being:

- Take your teaching outside. Nature can be a great environment for learning as it helps to calm and focus the brain.
- Create a “Positive Body/Self Talk” space in your school or classroom. Use a variety of media platforms to advocate for a “positive body/self talk” school environment. This is an environment free from language focused on weight, dieting and appearance, and free from negative media messages that promote unrealistic images.
- Review classroom/school bullying policies and procedures and ensure that weight-based teasing and taunting is not tolerated at your school.
- Create an environment that shows more realistic images of a variety of body sizes and shapes on posters, displays and bulletin boards in the school common areas and in the classrooms.



# PARENT INVOLVEMENT

*Q: Are there resources available for parents to learn about promoting a healthy body image?*

Parents play an important role in helping children learn about healthy body image. There are a variety of resources available for parents to learn about this topic. Talk to your **Public Health Nurse** as the Health Unit has resources, newsletter inserts and information that can be provided to send home to parents.

For body image resources for parents, go to:

- **RUDD Center:** Information for parents on weight bias and how to talk to their kids.
- **Ellyn Satter:** Tips on feeding your children and family.
- **Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Infographic** and the following three Fact Sheets for more tips.
  - **Mental Well-Being Fact Sheet**
  - **Healthy Eating Fact Sheet**
  - **Physical Activity Fact Sheet**
- **A Tool for Parenting Children**
- **A Tool for Parenting Teens**
- **Triple P** - A positive parenting program that helps you explore solutions to normal every day parenting challenges. Also check out the **Triple P cafes**, Seminars and other local parenting session offered.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This resource was created with the accompanying PowerPoint presentation by the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit. The authors are not responsible for the information or content found at Web sites within this resource.

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### Note from authors:

This resource was developed in order to create a change in the social environment in which our children/students live. We hope you will share and use this information to create a shift in the way we role model. We recognize that most people want to help children to be healthier and happier and hopefully this resource will help us to have this desired impact. Thanks to all who were involved!

Sincerely,

*Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds Committee Members*