



Positive Body Image

**FOUR WEEKS OF EASY ACTIVITIES FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS
TO PRATICE MENTAL HEALTH SKILLS WITHIN THEIR CLASSROOMS.**

Week 1: Comparison and why we shouldn't do it

Week 2: Social Media

Week 3: Banishing body talk

Week 4: Value ourselves and everyone else

INTRODUCTION

Body image is the mental picture in your mind and the feelings and judgements you have about your own body (CMHA, 2015). A positive body image can give you confidence and optimism (NEDIC). A poor body image can damage self-esteem and lead to depression, disordered eating, stress on friendships, or feeling like you don't belong at your school (NEDIC-a).

Your body image can be influenced by family, friends, teachers or coaches, celebrities, and the media (NEDIC-a). "Body talk" and physical appearance/weight bias are extremely common and cause young people to make harmful comparisons to "appearance ideals" (NEDIC-b). Bullying could occur if a person's appearance falls outside that "ideal" (NEDIC-c, MHLTC 2018). It's important to recognize that individual differences in body shape and appearance are normal and desirable. [How to nurture positive body image in your child](#) has suggestions for how parents can nurture body image confidence in their families. The SWPH resource, [10 Tips to Help Your Child Have a Positive Relationship with Food and Their Body](#), could also be shared with families at your school this month. Visit [BrightBites.ca](#) to learn more about creating a more body inclusive school.

KEY POINTS

- Comparing ourselves to ideals of appearance or body size is not realistic and can bring us down. Being perfect is impossible. Encourage students to confront superficial comparisons and to focus on their inner qualities instead. This can improve their self-esteem and body image revealing a more diverse and interesting world.
- Social media messages and images, especially images that are altered to meet appearance ideals, invite self-comparison which can lead to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.
- Body talk (any conversation about another person's appearance) can be harmful, even if it is intended as a positive compliment. An increased focus on appearance can devalue other qualities that make us interesting. If body talk is used as an insult, it is a form of bullying that can lead to depression and self-harm.
- People's bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Body shape and size is determined primarily by genetics and is out of an individual's control. Valuing each person for their "one-of-a-kind-ness" increases empathy and understanding for us all.

BODY
POSITIVE

Weekly Announcements (Mental Health Monday)

Week One Announcement:

Do you ever think “I wish I could be more like someone else”? Comparing the way that we look to how other people look is common. Whether we are comparing ourselves to friends or to celebrities, comparisons can hurt us. We forget about the important qualities inside that make us great! What are your special traits?

Week Two Announcement:

Social media is meant to connect us, but why does it so often bring us down? Perfect-looking selfies on apps like Instagram or TikTok pressure users to post perfect images of themselves. Selfies are often edited, and the real person is lost in the illusion. All this worry about appearance can harm our mental health. It is a good idea to spend time doing real things (like going for a walk or making something), with real friends who see you for who you are instead of stressing about “likes” on TikTok!

Week Three Announcement:

Have you ever heard of “Body Talk”? Body Talk is a common habit that we all share, but it can be harmful, even when we mean it as a compliment. Body Talk is any conversation about looks and body shape. We start to worry too much about what we look like. Instead let's highlight each other's great personalities. You can say things like “She is so smart and friendly” or “I think he is funny!” Challenge yourself this week to Banish Body Talk!

Week Four Announcement:

There is only one YOU – and being one of a kind is a good thing! Think about dogs for example. Would we want there to be only one kind of dog? Is a poodle better than a Great Dane or better than a chihuahua?! NO! We love them all! Valuing only one kind of person or one shape misses all our wonderful differences. Think about what makes you unique and show everyone your true colours!



ACTIVITIES

- Confront comparisons: promote a discussion about the harms that can come from comparing yourself to others. Show the video clips:
 - [Jessica's daily affirmation video](#) vs
 - [Change one thing video](#) (Dove Video)
- Discuss ways your students can build themselves up (positive self-talk) versus running themselves down (negative self-talk).
- [Social Media Breakdown – NEDA](#) – activity is on page 7 of the linked resource Appropriate for intermediate aged students.
- Beyond Images Banish Body Talk module. Students will learn the problems body talk can cause and practice ways to challenge everyday body talk. Fill out the [short form to get access to the gr. 4 lesson 1 Banishing Body Talk module](#) (Appropriate for junior and intermediate students)
- Seeing beyond physical appearance:
 - Use the ["I" in image \(SMHO\)](#) prompts to have students look at images and choose ones with meaning for them. Use your own images or [images found here](#).
 - Talk to students about things they like about themselves beyond physical appearance. Use prompts from [NEDIC Beyond Images](#) curriculum to guide your discussion (Fill out the [short form to get access to the gr. 4 lesson 2 module](#), and [scroll to activity 9](#)). Appropriate for all grades.



Book and/or Video Recommendations

- What's my Superpower [Grades K-3] on [SMHO read aloud](#) --- each of us has individual gifts
- [Bodies are Cool – Tyler Feder](#) [Grades K – 2]
- The Body Book – Roz McLean [Grades K] (copies to borrow available from Southwestern Public Health)
- [Shapesville – Andy Mills and Becky Osborne](#) (copies available to borrow)
 - with discussion questions [Grades 2 – 3]



For Educators Who Use Social Media

- Post images of a classroom activity where students develop non-appearance-based compliments for one another. Put your "compliment cards" on a bulletin board display.
- Share a series of photos of artwork showing the inside qualities of your students. Celebrate the "me beyond what you see".
- Share a picture of a "Your True Colours" collage made with images of activities and passions that make each student who they are.



References

- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). Body Image, Self Esteem and Mental Health. 2015. Available from: <https://cmha.bc.ca/documents/body-image-self-esteem-and-mental-health/>
- National Eating Disorders Information Centre (NEDIC) - a. Beyond Images: Body Image and Self Esteem Backgrounder for Teachers. N.d. Available from: <https://beyondimagesca.files.wordpress.com/2022/06/backgrounder-for-teachers.pdf>
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- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MHLTC). School Health Guidelines. 2018. Available from: https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/School_Health_Guideline_2018.pdf
- Custom data from the 2020-2021 COMPASS study conducted at the University of Waterloo, and funded by CIHR

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