

# Learning environments that promote positive body image

Early learning services and schools are ideal places to foster a positive body image culture, model body and appearance acceptance, and appreciate and respect diversity.

## What can learning communities do?

There are many actions a learning community can take. Some strategies involve a policy response, while others need action at the individual level. They can be integrated into the work you are already doing to enhance children and young people's mental and physical health. Here are some examples that can be introduced in the classroom, the early learning setting, whole learning community and wider community levels.

### In the classroom

- Teach social and emotional skills in the classroom, including acceptance and self-compassion, especially of one's body.
- Display posters and other materials that reflect the diversity of children and young people in terms of body shape, size, ability and ethnicity and culture. This helps ensure your learning community is inclusive of all children, young people and families.
- Promote a healthy culture by modelling and promoting positive body image, an enjoyment of sport and non-competitive activity, and an acceptance of everyone's non-appearance based strengths and skills.
- Help children and young people develop a strong sense of self, as well as the skills to buffer unhelpful messages about body, beauty and appearance ideals in media and on social media to help reduce body comparisons.

- Provide education about physical activity and nutrition that has a positive focus on energy, fun, function, social connection and overall health and wellbeing, rather than a negative focus on weight and dietary control or management
- Stop weighing children and young people, and other activities that ask them to calculate body mass index, record food intake or encourage calorie counting.

### Across your learning community

- Establish effective policies and practices that aim to promote respectful interactions and prevent appearance-related teasing and bullying.
- Include weight and appearance-based teasing in existing anti-bullying policies and actively support those who are being teased or bullied because of their appearance, body size, shape, abilities or ethnicity and culture, and support those who are teasing others.
- Offer and make a range of nutritious food available in early learning services and schools, and ensure that food, food groups and lunch box shaming is strongly discouraged.
- Provide staff with professional development opportunities to build knowledge and skills on the topics of body image, eating and exercise behaviours and what to do if they're concerned about a student.

- Incorporate media and social media literacy education to help children and young people develop their critical processing skills.
- Reduce commentary around appearance and bodies and focus on non-appearance attributes and achievements.
- Provide training for staff and ensure policies are in place for early identification of and management of students with eating disorders.

### **Partner with families**

- Provide information for families about how they can help their child or young person develop a positive body image and a strong sense of self.
- Foster a strong relationship and sense of trust with families.
- Cultivate a welcoming environment for families, so they feel comfortable and confident discussing any issue, modelling the messages at home and asking for help if needed.
- Incorporate the messages of acceptance and diversity of body size, shape and appearance in homework activities and projects completed at home.
- Share information about what to do if concerned so that young people can be supported earlier than later if problems with body image, eating and physical activity are emerging.

### **Be You Professional Learning**

You can learn more about fostering the mental health of children and young people in the [Mentally Healthy Communities](#) and [Family Partnerships](#) domains.

You can learn about providing early support in the [Early Support](#) domain.

## **External links**

Butterfly – [National Helpline](#)

Mental Health First Aid Australia – [What do we need to know about young people and eating disorders?](#)

National Eating Disorder Collaboration – [Eating Disorders in Schools: Prevention, Early Identification and Response](#)

## **Bibliography**

Visit [Learning environments that promote positive body image](#) for a list of references for this Fact Sheet.

