

The Healthy Body Image Curriculum

Promoting Healthy Body Image, Eating, Fitness and Weight in Children and Teens

Kathy Kater, LICSW

Contact the presenter: 651 770 2693 Email: www.kathykater@isd.net Website: www.bodyimagehealth.org

Whether for appearance or health, *anxiety about weight* affects just about everyone today, and at ever younger ages. The unwholesome choices that result can have serious psychological and medical consequences. With eating disorders on the one hand and a rising rate of fatness on the other, it is critical that students learn early-on the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that promote healthy body images, eating, fitness and weight.

I. The full spectrum of body image, eating, fitness and weight concerns—who is affected, and why should we be concerned?

I felt pretty good about my body until 6th grade, but then everyone else hated theirs, so I thought I should too.

II. The need for a new model: *You cannot solve problems using the same thinking that created them.* (Einstein)

Current paradigms about body image and weight present contradictory and ill-informed messages. Educators must recognize the conflicting pressures and myths that promote most eating-related problems today, and the lessons children need to resist these.

MYTH 1: Image is valued over substance: "How I look" is more important than "who I am." Having the "right look" is essential to being acceptable.

HBI teaches students to understand and resist objectification. Lessons help student's to:

- Develop perspective on today's unrealistic body image attitudes. Understand that undue emphasis on appearance is a formula for unhappiness, chronic stress, and poorer overall health.
- Become media literate and recognize advertising strategies. Think critically about media messages that encourage body dissatisfaction.
- Develop a strong sense of identity based on substantial *inner* qualities, rather than on packaging or appearance.

MYTH 2: Denial of biological diversity: *Anyone can be slim if they work at it. Fatter people eat too much and/or are inactive. Fat is bad/wrong/ unhealthy.*

HBI teaches basic human biology. Lessons help students to:

- Understand the normal, expected addition of body fat that naturally occurs during puberty and other developmental stages of life.
- Respect and appreciate the genetic diversity of body shapes and sizes.
- Understand how the internal weight regulatory system *limits* the extent of long term control that is possible over weight through healthy means. Many factors influence fatness/slimness.

Myth 3: Denial of the effects of externally prescribed hunger regulation: *Dieting is an effective weight loss strategy.*

HBI teaches the facts about internal hunger regulation and the effects of restricted or restrained eating for weight loss. Lessons help student's to:

- Recognize that there are predictable, counterproductive results when hunger is restricted. More than 85% of weight lost through any type of dieting is regained; over half of dieters regain *more* weight than was lost.

Myth 4: Discounting the value of health; complacency about lifestyle choices that do not result in the desired look. *If I can't be thin, who cares what I eat? Healthy choices for health's sake are too much work!*

HBI teaches students to connect with health as a value in its own right, and to align their actions accordingly. Lessons help student's to:

- Make eating well a priority. Satisfy hunger completely with a balanced variety of wholesome food to provide the nutrients and energy bodies need. Enjoy “entertainment eating” in ways that do not interfere with nutritional needs or ignore hunger satiation.
- Make movement an active choice. Spend enough time and energy engaged in physical activity to maintain fitness throughout the life cycle. Enjoy sedentary entertainment in ways that do not interfere with strength, endurance, and agility.
- Discover and accept all the many diverse sizes and shapes that result when bodies are well fed and physically fit.
- Look for realistic role models that promote self-confidence and self-esteem. Resist unhealthy and unrealistic social norms about prescribed weight standards, dieting, low nutrient food choices and sedentary entertainment.

III. Application of *HBI* and the *Model for Healthy Body Image*

THE MODEL FOR HEALTHY BODY IMAGE, EATING, FITNESS AND WEIGHT			
Conceptual Building Blocks	Foundation	Desired Outcome	Goal
<p>Developmental change is inevitable. Normal changes may include weight gain and temporary out-of-proportion growth. Fat does not, by itself, define “overweight.”</p> <p>Genetics and other internal weight regulators strictly limit the degree to which shape, weight & Body Mass Index can be manipulated through healthy means.</p> <p>Restricted or restrained hunger (dieting) results in predictable consequences that are <i>counterproductive</i> to sustained weight loss and interfere with normal hunger regulation.</p>	<p>Recognize and respect basic biology/physiology; understand what <i>cannot</i> be controlled about size, shape and hunger through healthy means.</p>	<p>Accept the limits to external control of body size and shape: “This is the Body I was born to have.”</p>	<p>Healthy Body Image</p>
<p>Balance attention to many aspects of identity. Looks are only one part.</p> <p>Satisfy hunger completely with enough varied, wholesome food in a stable, predictable manner on a regular basis.</p> <p>Limit sedentary choices to promote a physically active lifestyle through all stages of life.</p> <p>Choose role models that reflect a realistic standard and enhance self esteem.</p>	<p>Emphasize the real choices available to positively influence health.</p>	<p>Enjoy eating well for balance, energy, enjoyment, and hunger satisfaction.</p> <p>Create a physically active lifestyle for fitness, endurance, fun, relaxation and stress relief.</p>	<p>Healthy Eating and Physical Fitness</p> <p>Well Fed, Fit People With Healthy Diverse Weights</p>
<p>Promote historical perspective on today’s cultural attitudes related to body image, eating, fitness, and health.</p> <p>Develop media literacy. Learn to think critically about messages that negatively influence body image and encourage weight bias.</p> <p>Support others in resisting unhealthy norms about body image, weight, dieting, low nutrient food choices, excessive eating for entertainment, and sedentary entertainment.</p>	<p>Develop social and cultural resiliency.</p>	<p>Develop autonomy, self esteem, confidence, and the ability for critical thinking.</p>	

The Body Image Building Blocks

