



TEACHING ABOUT BODY IMAGE

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1. Background

This guidance summary is for professionals in schools - bringing together key opportunities within and outside of the curriculum to promote positive body image in ALL pupils, and quality assured resources that can be used.

After schoolwork, pupils across Hertfordshire identify their 'appearance' as the thing they worry about most, affecting almost half of all young people. This worry and negative perception of their body and appearance has increased significantly since Covid-19 and although more prevalent in teenage girls, is also becoming common in younger children and boys. There has also been a local and national increase in referrals into eating disorder services.

It is so important that we therefore look to take every opportunity to promote body positivity with children and young people.

The National Mental Health charity, Young Minds, provide the following useful summary about what is meant by the term 'body image':

"Body image is how we think and feel about ourselves physically, and how we believe others see us."

"When we talk about body image, there are lots of ways we can think about our body and the way we look. You might find that there are times when you like your body, or parts of your body, and times when you struggle with how you look. Body image is not just about our weight, it can also be things like:

- comparing how you look with friends or people you follow on social media
- struggling to love and accept your body
- feeling as though your body shape is not represented in the media
- hiding your body because you feel ashamed by it

- struggling to find clothes for your body, particularly if you have a physical disability
- feeling misunderstood about your body when people make assumptions about things like, why you might need a wheelchair
- feeling like you are not attractive enough
- birthmarks, surgery scars or acne affecting how you feel about how you look
- feeling as though your body does not match your gender.”

2. Promoting body image within the curriculum

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum

Aspects of the new RSE curriculum that could relate to social media use and specifically to issues of body image include mental wellbeing, internet safety and harms, online relationships, being safe, social media anxiety, media literacy and personal safety and responsibility.

In later primary school and in secondary school, pupils should be taught why social media, computer games and online gaming have age restrictions and should be equipped to manage common difficulties encountered online.

By the end of secondary school, pupils must have been taught about “the impact of unhealthy or obsessive comparison with others online, including through setting unrealistic expectations for body image, how people may curate a specific image of their life online, and over-reliance on online relationships including social media”. This sits within the ‘internet safety and harms’ elements of the curriculum.

Conversations about body image could also be woven effectively into any curriculum looking at ‘changes to the adolescent body’:

Training resources: [Teacher training: changing adolescent body - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/teacher-training/curriculum/relationships-and-sex-education)

Ultimately, teaching about body image can provide students with the opportunity to explore and reflect on this topic and its implications. Hopefully this can help to change attitudes and improve confidence.

Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) Association guidance:

The PSHE Association provides clear and comprehensive guidance to schools on teaching about body image within PSHE (KS1 – 4) as well as taking a whole school approach. This guidance document also links to a range of other useful resources:

PSHE – [Key standards in teaching about body image 22nd April.pdf \(pshe-association.org.uk\)](https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/Key-standards-in-teaching-about-body-image-22nd-April.pdf)

PHE Rise Above resources:

PHE provide resources for teaching about body image in a digital world for KS3 and KS4 pupils. You can also find relevant content in the ‘unhelpful thoughts’ resources.

There are also general social media resources for year 6 and KS3 and 4.

All of these resources can be found here: [Mental wellbeing | Overview | PHE School Zone](https://www.phe.org.uk/mental-wellbeing/overview/)

Dove Campaign resources:

Positive body image is closely linked to positive self-esteem. Dove provide KS3 self-esteem resources for single or five sessions - [Dove Self-Esteem Project teaching resources \(pshe-association.org.uk\)](https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/dove-self-esteem-project-teaching-resources/)

Media Smart resources:

Media Smart's free lesson resources are designed to get **students aged 9 to 11 and 11 to 14** talking about body image and advertising, and exploring ways to develop positive body image.

KS2 resources are for all students within this age group: [Media Smart KS2 Body Image and Advertising Resource | www.pshe-association.org.uk](http://www.pshe-association.org.uk) (pshe-association.org.uk)

KS3 resources are suitable for all students but with more of a male focus:

Media Smart KS3 [Body Image and Advertising Resource | www.pshe-association.org.uk](http://www.pshe-association.org.uk) (pshe-association.org.uk)

3. Inclusive education

In order to meaningfully promote positive body image, it's important to do this in an equitable and inclusive way.

The PSHE association [guidance document](#) on body image provides further information on this and Stonewall have provided [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender \(LGBT\) Inclusive Education](#) lesson plans for both early years settings and secondary schools aged pupils. Schools may choose to use these resources when appropriate and timely to do so.

In Hertfordshire, YCH Services for Young People offer support and guidance on a range of key issues for LGBT+ young people, including body image, via their LGBT+ projects for young people aged 13-17. These projects provide a safe environment in which LGBT+ young people can meet other LGBT+ young people in their local area, get support and learn new things. There is more information on how young people can access these projects here:

<https://www.ychservicesforyoungpeople.org/support-for-young-people/support-for-young-lgbtplus-people/>

Further to this, YCH Services for Young People have recently launched the LGBT+ Schools Project, which offers free support to secondary schools across Hertfordshire with raising awareness of key issues for LGBT+ young people, including body image. Our team of friendly Youth Workers offer schools free:

- awareness raising and anti-bullying workshops.
- support with setting up LGBT+ groups (including LGBT+ ally schemes).
- break time pop ups signposting to further support.
- staff training.

For more information on how to access the LGBT+ Schools Project please email youngprideinherts@hertfordshire.gov.uk.

Finally, the Young Pride in Herts website has information on a range of key issues for LGBT+ young people, including health and wellbeing. The website can be found here: <https://www.youngprideinherts.org/information/health-and-wellbeing/>

4. What does the research tell us about how best to promote body positivity in school settings?

- It is always useful to use quality assured and evidence-based resources when promoting body positivity.
- Research suggests that separating pupils by sex when teaching about body image can have a more positive impact on improving their body image.

- There is evidence to suggest that teachers find their body image lessons have a more positive impact on female students than male students - it is important to speak to students about how the content of lessons can meet the needs and be relevant for ALL students.
- Also focussing on younger adolescents (aged 12 -13) can be more effective than focussing on older adolescents.
- Concentrating on teaching younger pupils (primary aged) to be 'unique and special' and appreciate differences and being proud of who they are as individuals through art projects, collages, circle time sessions and open discussions, can be beneficial. Also, it can be useful to include elements of awareness of how much they watch TV and advertisements and how these images may influence their body satisfaction.
- In order to promote healthy eating, communications must include active listening, interactions and be written in plain English. Focussing materials on healthy eating instead of obesity prevention along with creating a healthy food environment at school, as well as seeking parental involvement, reinforces healthy eating messaging.

5. Information and useful resources to share with pupils:

Young Minds and O2 tips and advice on how to enjoy a more positive time online

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/social-media-and-mental-health/>

Young Minds have also shared information on how to boost your self-esteem:

Believe in yourself (youngminds.org.uk)

There is also useful information on the Young Minds website in relation to mental health from the perspective of racism, sexuality, and gender. These, and other resources can be found here:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself>

For 9-15 year olds girls, the following book can be useful: <https://thebodyimagebookforgirls.com/>

6. Information and useful resources to share with parents/carers:

The Dove 'Uniquely Me' toolkit is a useful resource for parents and carers to help build their child/ children's self-esteem: [Uniquely Me – Dove Self-Esteem Project](#)

Young Minds have produced 'Ten tips for talking to your child about their use of social media and the internet':

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-social-media-and-the-internet/>

MindEd offer a range of free e-learning modules for parents/carers. Some relevant ones are listed below:

MPC_03_10 [Parenting In A Digital World](#) | MPC_03_10 [Parenting In A Digital World](#) (mindedforfamilies.org.uk)

MPC_03_04 [Building Confidence And Resilience](#) | MPC_03_04 [Building Confidence And Resilience](#) (mindedforfamilies.org.uk)

And for parents/carers concerned that their child may be developing an eating disorder, the following e-learning may be useful: MPC_03_14 [Eating Disorders](#) | MPC_03_14 [Eating Disorders](#) (mindedforfamilies.org.uk)

7. How can schools monitor change/impact?

Secondary schools can participate in the annual young people's health and wellbeing survey in Hertfordshire. It's a fully funded survey and contains questions relating to body image (e.g. 'how much do you worry about your appearance?')

Following the delivery of lessons on body image, pupils can be asked how useful they found the lesson, whether it has shifted their perceptions, and how the lesson could be improved.

If you want to measure self-esteem, a validated self-esteem survey you could use with 12-18 year olds is Rosenberg's [Self-Esteem Scale](#). There are also surveys for younger age groups, including Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, validated for use with 9-12 year olds.

Any work you do to promote body positivity, and to monitor the impact of your efforts, will be a useful element to include when you are applying for the Hertfordshire mental health kitemark. You can find more details of the kitemark [here](#) (login will be required)