



The Media and Body Image Activity Supplement

For young people media messages about body shape and size can be hugely influential on how they feel about themselves and their own bodies. Media messages that create cultural definitions of beauty and attractiveness are often acknowledged as being amongst the factors that contribute to the rise of eating disorders in young people. This activity supplement looks at how the media uses unrealistic body images to sell products and provides activities for youth workers in tackling this sensitive topic with young people.

Ice Breaker

Aim: To get young people to think about the sorts of questions and worries they have about body image, confidence and self-esteem while making them comfortable with sharing their feelings and thoughts.

Materials: A space large enough for everyone to sit on the floor and a tennis ball. When everyone is seated tell the young people that this exercise is designed to get them to think about beauty, body image and healthy eating.

Here are some sample ideas and topics to use in this activity:

A-Z of Beautiful Celebrities: Can they think of a celebrity for every letter? Each young person has to use the next letter in the alphabet to name a different glamorous celebrity. To

make it interesting you can alternate between male and female stars on every turn.

Body Modification: How many different ways can they think of to change the appearance of their body? This could include everything from hair, makeup, tattoos, piercings, diets and exercise, to tummy tucks, boob jobs, hair implants and facelifts etc..

Eating: How many different eating disorders or bad eating habits can they think of?

Begin activity:

- Throw the ball to a random young person who has to come up with a name, idea or word which fits the current topic.
- If they get stuck or fail to come up with an answer within 10 seconds, they pass the ball to the person on their left who tries to come up with an answer instead.
- Once they have spoken, the young person holding the ball tosses it back to the group leader

who then throws it to another person.

- Only the person holding the ball is allowed to speak.

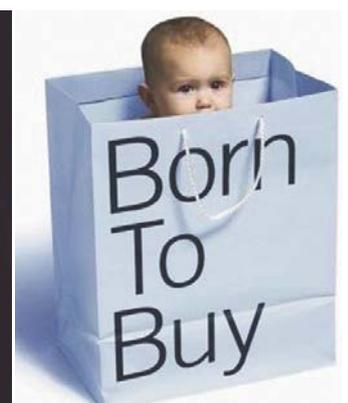
Source: *Gok The Naked Truth Teachers Pack*

Activity One: Defining Body Image and Influences

Aim: To increase awareness of where influences come from around the issue of body image.

Materials: Flip chart paper, markers and various fashion magazines with pictures of "perfect" bodies.

- Ask them what they think "body image" means to them?
- How do the young people see their body?
- How do they think others see their body?



How do they feel as a result? Make a list of their responses on the flip chart paper.

Ask the young people what “**positive body image**” is (*seeing and appreciating your body as it really is and feeling comfortable and confident with your body*). Write their responses on the flip chart paper.

Then ask them what “**negative body image**” is (*having a distorted perception of body shape, feeling ashamed and self-conscious about your body or feeling uncomfortable and awkward in your body*). Write their responses on the flip chart paper too.

Ask the young people what they feel influences their ideas of body image and what is their idea about what an ideal body should be. Get the young people to make up posters of all the qualities they think make up a “perfect” body based on photographs from magazines.

Source: *Nutrition and Physical Activity for Lifelong Health Lesson Fourteen / ETR Associates*

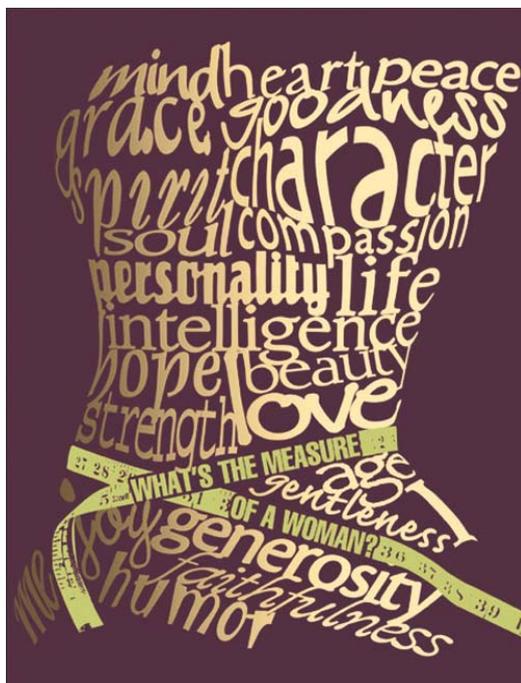
Activity Two: Create a Mixed Message Board

Aim: This is a hands-on arts activity that will help young people learn more about body image, eating disorders and recognise the mixed messages portrayed by the media regarding health, body, nutrition and reality!

Materials: Magazines, newspapers, glue, flip chart paper and markers.

Begin by asking the group what they know about body image and eating disorders, their causes and effects. How have they heard of these diseases? They may know celebrities who have been identified as having eating disorders.

Ask them to brainstorm the reasons that eating disorders are so prevalent



in our society even though food is abundant, and certain body shapes are valued.

What messages do the media give about food and physical beauty?

Divide the young people into small groups and give them a selection of magazines and newspapers, ask them to find examples of conflicting messages about eating and body image, such as ads for high-calorie foods with overly thin models.

Ask them to think of their own examples, and after they have compiled 5 to 10 powerful mixed messages, have each group create a “Mixed Messages” poster or collage that shows the volume of messages we receive in our daily lives about food and appearances.

Put up the posters around your youth club. Finish by asking the young people how they can help themselves to become more aware of the mixed messages and avoid conditions that trigger eating disorders.

Source:
www.discoveryeducation.com



Activity Three: Buy the Perfect Body!

Aim: To get young people to explore the impact of magazine advertisements on body image and individual purchasing and to get them to take a good look at society’s pressure to conform to standards of beauty, particularly to be thin and the prejudice against being “overweight.”

Materials: Magazines, glue, sample advertisements, scissors, flip chart paper for each group and markers.

Before the group meet, gather some sample advertisements of high profile brands that young people may relate to and ask them:

- What is it in the ad that appeals to them?
- How does the ad get people to buy the product?
- How does the ad make the person/people look?
- How does seeing or reading this ad make them feel?
- Does the ad tell the truth (give the whole picture)? Why or why not?”

Next divide students into small groups and give them magazines and other materials.

Ask them to go through the magazines and cut out pictures or words from ads that make them want to buy that product or be more like the person in the ad and have them make a poster which they present to the larger group.

Follow up with, "Why would companies only use images of 'perfect' people to sell their product?"

Discuss how the 'perfect' images are produced; e.g., computer enhancement, airbrushing or combining various parts of different people to create one image, etc.

Ask them what they feel the media could do differently to make sure they are not giving out the wrong idea of the 'perfect' body or what it means to be healthy?

Source: www.uen.org/Lessonplan

Activity Four: Prejudice and Body Image Discussion

Aim: To increase the young people's awareness of their physical self and of media influences on their body image and behavior.

Materials: Magazines, glue, scissors, markers, sellotape, flip chart paper - two sheets for each group. Try to



have a good mixture of magazines that show images of people of varied race, ethnicity, shape and age.

Point out that many people young or old do not feel proud and confident about how they look.

Divide the young people into small same sex groups and give each group flip chart paper and a marker.

Ask the young people to make a list on one piece of flip chart paper of the parts of the body that people of their gender often feel dissatisfied with.

Label your list **Men often do not like...** or **Women often do not like...**

Using two or three magazines, find pictures of people of their gender that they think are attractive.

Make a collage of these pictures on the flip chart paper and add words or phrases that describe an attractive member of their own gender.

When they have finished the collage, sellotape both the list and the collage side by side on the walls.

Then ask the young people to take some time to read and look at all the collages.

Discussion

Do you think that, in general young people are satisfied with their own appearance?

Where do we get our ideas about what is attractive and what is not?

Did you find pictures that coincided with your ideas about what is attractive? If not, what were you looking for that you couldn't find?

Do media images influence how attractive or appealing we feel?

Can we change some parts of our body? and do we as people change when we change parts of our bodies?

What parts of us can we not change?

What things can an adolescent do to feel better about his or her body?

Source: www.advocatesforyouth.org

Activity Five: Coat of Arms

Aim: To bolster a young person's self image and self-esteem.

Materials: Give each of the young people a piece of blank A4 paper and some markers, coloured pencils or paints.

- Ask each of them to design their own 'coat of arms', listing four personal strengths that they believe they possess. These could be physical, personality-based or a particular skill they have mastered.
- Ask them to also come up with a personal motto to go underneath their shield.
- When the students have finished, make a wall display out of their creations so everyone can see the things they like about themselves.

It might be a good idea for you as the youth worker to come up with your own shield and motto too!

Source: *Gok The Naked Truth Teachers Pack*

Activity Six: Fashion, Media and Body Image

Aim: To explore the global dimension of media marketing and body image.

Materials: Selection of magazines and newspapers and Internet access if possible.

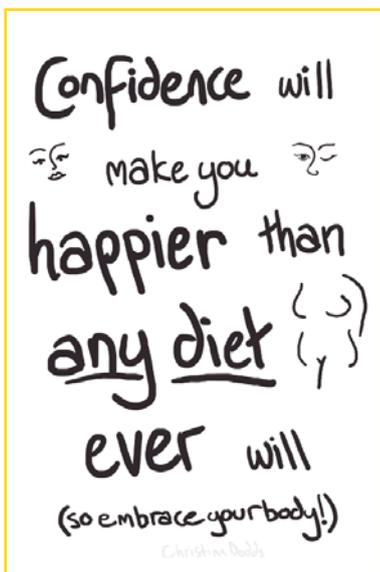
- Ask groups of young people to look through newspapers and magazines and cut out as many images of people they can find.
- Ask them to group the images into 3 groups of men, women and children.
- Then ask them to divide the groups again into racial groups, national groups, cultural groups, or professions.

- Finally ask them what they notice about what sorts of people are commonly represented as being professional or fashion symbols etc.
- Why do they think this is?
- What does this say about stereotypes of men and women, about different races and cultures and about what is considered 'beautiful'?

Adaptations:

If the group has Internet access the young people can look at fashion/news web-sites from different countries and cultures – and do a similar activity.

Source: www.cyfanfyd.org.uk



Tips for Improving Body Image for Young People

Some young people think they need to change how they look to feel good about themselves. But all you need to do is change the way you see your body and how you think about yourself. Here are some tips on doing that:

Recognise that your body is your own, no matter what shape or size it comes in.

Try to focus on how strong and healthy your body is and the things it can do, not what's wrong with it or what you feel you want to change

about it. If you're worried about your weight or size, check with your doctor to verify that things are OK. But it's no one's business but your own what your body is like; you have to be happy with yourself.

Identify which aspects of your appearance you can realistically change and which you can't.

Humans, by definition, are imperfect. It's what makes each of us unique and original! Everyone (even the most perfect-seeming celeb) has things that they can't change and need to accept — like their height, for example, or their shoe size. Remind yourself that real people aren't perfect and perfect people aren't real (they're usually airbrushed!).

If there are things about yourself that you want to change and can, do this by making goals for yourself.

For example, if you want to get fit, make a plan to exercise everyday and eat healthy. Then keep track of your progress until you reach your goal. Meeting a challenge you set for yourself is a great way to boost self-esteem!

When you hear negative comments coming from within, tell yourself to stop.

Appreciate that each person is more than just how he or she looks on any given day. We're complex and constantly changing. Try to focus on what's unique and interesting about yourself.

Try building your self-esteem by giving yourself three compliments every day.

While you're at it, every evening list three things in your day that really gave you pleasure. It can be anything from the way the sun felt on your face, the sound of your favourite band, or the way someone laughed at your jokes. By focusing on the good things you do and the positive aspects of your life, you can change how you feel about yourself. Some people with physical disabilities or differences may feel they are not seen for their true selves because of their bodies and what they can and can't do. Other people may have such serious body image issues that they need a bit more help. Working with a counsellor or therapist can help some people gain perspective and learn to focus on their individual strengths as well as develop healthier thinking.



Where to go next...

- www.bodywhys.ie
- www.spunout.ie
- www.headstrong.ie
- www.mindyourself.ie
- www.eatingdisorder.ie
- www.irishhealth.com
- www.aware.ie
- www.reachout.com
- www.healthpromotion.ie

- www.mentalhealthireland.ie
- www.media-awareness.ca
- www.headroom.net.au
- www.cyh.com
- www.kidshealth.org
- www.youthhealthtalk.org
- www.me-and-us.co.uk
- www.teenissues.co.uk