

Building Healthy Body Esteem

To promote body esteem: Recognize unhealthy cultural pressures. Actively teach students the facts, attitudes and values that will help them to resist the toxic messages (myths) in today's environment.

Myth 1: Image is valued over substance. "How I look" is more important than "who I am." An essential criterion for the "right" look is a thin/lean body.

Teach students to understand and resist objectification. Teach students to:

- Acquire historical perspective on today's body image attitudes. Understand that an emphasis on superficial appearance is a formula for unhappiness.
- Become media literate and recognize advertising strategies. Think critically about media messages that encourage unrealistic, unhealthy body image attitudes.
- Develop a strong sense of identity based on *inner* qualities, rather than on appearance.

Myth 2: Denial of biological diversity. Anyone can be slim if they work at it. Fatness inevitably means people eat too much and/or are inactive. Fat is bad/wrong.

Teach basic human biology. Teach students to:

- Understand the normal, expected addition of body fat that is common 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. Many factors influence fatness/slimness.

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

Teach the facts about dieting for weight loss. Teach students to:

- Recognize that there are predictable, counterproductive results when hunger is restricted according to an external plan. Ninety-five percent of weight lost through dieting is regained, usually with added pounds.

Myth 4: Discounting the value of health; complacency about lifestyle choices that do not result in the desired look. Eat, drink and be merry. Healthy choices (for health's sake) are too much work!

Teach students to value health and the steps to achieve it. Teach students to:

- Make it a priority to eat well. Satisfy hunger completely with a balanced variety of wholesome food that provides all the nutrients and energy bodies need. Enjoy "entertainment eating" in limited doses 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 limited doses that do not interfere with physical endurance, strength and agility.
- Discover and accept the many diverse sizes 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.