

Promoting Healthy Body Image, Eating, and Weight-Related Attitudes

To develop a healthy body image in today's social context, challenge toxic cultural myths that encourage body dissatisfaction, eating, fitness, and weight problems.

Challenge myths promoting image 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:

- 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, *not* on appearance.

Challenge myths that deny biological diversity: *Anyone can be slim if they work at it. Fatter people inevitably eat too much, and/or are not active. Fat is bad/wrong.*

Teach students the biological principals of size diversity:

- Understand the normal, expected addition of body fat that is common during puberty and other developmental stages of life.
- Respect and appreciate vast 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. It is presumptuous and prejudicial to judge an individual's lifestyle behaviors by his or her appearance.

Challenge myths that deny the universal and negative effects of externally prescribed hunger regulation: *Dieting is an effective weight-loss strategy.*

Teach students the facts about dieting for weight loss:

- Recognize there are predictable, counterproductive results when hunger is not satisfied. Ninety percent of weight lost through dieting is regained, usually with added pounds.

Challenge myths that discount health as a value and that encourage complacency about 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 children of every size to value health:

- Eat well. Satisfy hunger completely with a balanced variety of wholesome food that provides all the nutrients and energy your body needs. Enjoy "entertainment eating" in limited doses that do not interfere with nutritional needs or ignore hunger satiation.
- Make movement a priority. Spend enough time and energy engaged in physical activity to maintain your body's fitness level throughout the life cycle. Enjoy sedentary entertainment in limited doses that do not interfere with physical endurance, strength, and agility.
- Look for realistic role models that help you to feel good about who you are. Resist pressures, prescribed unrealistic weight standards, dieting, low-nutrient foods, and sedentary entertainment.