

Grade 6: Healthy Mind & Emotions

Lesson 7: Body Image and Eating Disorders

Objectives:

1. Students will identify the qualities of a positive body image.
2. Students will create personal strategies to develop a positive body image for themselves.
3. Students will examine the ways that media influences body image.
4. Students will explain the relationship between media influences, body image and eating disorders.
5. Students will define eating disorders and four causes of eating disorders.
6. Students will define two types of eating disorders

Materials:

- “The Ugly Duckling” by Hans Christian Anderson
- Eating Disorders Information (**See Figure 1**)
- Magazines (children’s, teens, travel, health, men’s health, women’s health)
- Easel paper
- Poster boards
- Writing/drawing markers

Activity Summary:

In this lesson students will explore the concepts of body image, what influences body image and how to develop a positive body image. Students will explore eating disorders and the connection between those disorders and negative body image.

Background Information for the Teacher:

Attitude, Self-Concept and Body Image: Our attitudes are fundamental to our sense of (and oftentimes our actual) physical, mental and emotional well-being. We know that many things influence and shape our attitudes. Children and pre-adolescents are especially vulnerable to the external influences that shape self-concept and body image. Family, school and church are traditional sources of influence. The impact of **popular culture, media** and **peers** generally increases as a child matures, while the influence of family, school and church often diminishes.

The challenge is to develop clear and reliable inner guideposts that help a child sort through these influences. Being able to sow the seeds that cultivate a realistic and embracing **acceptance of self** as early as possible in life is crucial. Those seeds are the attitude and decision-making skill sets that are used to support health-enhancing ways of life.

Our self-concept is firmly embedded in our feelings and opinions about our body and its size, shape, weight, musculature, and abilities. We are a highly visual-oriented culture. How we look to others is often given greater priority and influence over how we appear to ourselves. If we like how we look we have a positive body image. If we don't like how we look we have a negative self-image, **How we feel about our body (our body image) directly influences how we feel about our self (our self-concept.)**

A person's attitude about their basic body image tends to be "acted out" in many areas of life, including:

- Decisions and behavior regarding food and exercise
- Social relationships
- School situations
- Our attitude about the use of harmful substances

If we like how we look, we tend to feel and act in a positive way, and be fully and energetically engaged in our life. However, feeling negatively about our body image can lead to harmful behaviors, decisions, and relationships. For instance, children with a negative body image are more at risk for developing an eating disorder. Both boys and girls are at risk for eating disorders when they have a poor body image.

The National Eating Disorders Association (www.NationalEatingDisorders.org) describes positive and negative body images:

Positive Body Image:

- Maintains a clear, accurate perception of body shape
- Celebrates and appreciates natural body shape
- Understands that physical appearance is not the measure of character or value of a person
- Does not spend an unreasonable amount of time worrying about food, weight and calories
- Feels comfortable and confident in one's own body

Negative Body Image:

- Has a distorted perception of body shape
- Believes that body shape or size is a sign of personal failure
- Feels others are more attractive
- Feels ashamed, self-conscious, and anxious about one's body
- Feels uncomfortable and awkward in one's body.

What's Right for Me?

What a person weighs and, even more importantly, how a person *feels* about their weight has a major impact on forming body image. This is an area where

our perceptions about our weight can be distorted and may contribute to a distorted and unrealistic body image. Weight and fat accumulation and distribution are influenced by many physiological factors: age, gender, height, heredity (family and ethnicity), and body composition. Our bodies are, to some degree, the inherited result of these factors. Learning to accept those things that simply cannot be changed and making healthy choices regarding those that can be changed is the key to cultivating a healthy body image.

Each child develops individually. Helping children understand weight as something unique to their particular body and growth rate is more useful than focusing on the number of pounds on the scale or looking like the other kids in the class, or people on television, in the movies or in magazines. While being overweight or underweight are both health hazards, a child's weight will fluctuate throughout their growing years, and a child may have periods of relative under- or over-weight that they eventually outgrow.

A person's "ideal weight" is not indicated by a specific number of pounds. Being in the appropriate weight range for height and body type is a healthier and more appropriate way to work with body weight. Body Mass Index can be a useful tool in helping determine if someone is in a healthy weight range for his/her height. While an individual can calculate his/her own BMI, it is very useful to talk about it with a health professional who can assist in understanding the information as it relates to that person's body type, growth changes and health issues as well as offer suggestions about how to achieve an appropriate body fat ratio.

Eating Disorders

Description: The American Psychiatric Association (APA) describes eating disorders as: "Illnesses in which the victims suffer severe disturbances in their eating behaviors and related thoughts and emotions. Those suffering from eating disorders typically become obsessed with food and their body weight as well."

Causes: The APA describes a person with an eating disorder as being obsessed with food, but the root causes of the problem are often more complex. According to the National Eating Disorders Association:

"People with eating disorders often use food and the control of food in an attempt to compensate for feelings and emotions that may otherwise seem over-whelming. Eating disorders are complex conditions that arise from a combination of long-standing behavioral, biological, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and social factors."

These factors include:

- **Biological:** Although still being researched, it is thought that the chemicals in the brain which control hunger, appetite and digestion can

become unbalanced. Genetic factors may also contribute to eating disorders.

- **Social:** Eating disorders may be a reflection of cultural values that glorify “thinness” and obtaining the “perfect body.” People with eating disorders may subscribe to narrow definitions of beauty that include only specific body weights and shapes, valuing people on physical appearance more than inner qualities and character.
- **Interpersonal:** A person with an eating disorder may have a history of being teased or ridiculed based on size or weight, have a history of sexual or physical abuse, or may have troubled family and/or personal relationships
- **Psychological:** A person with an eating disorder may suffer from low self-esteem, experience feelings of inadequacy or lack of control, or experience depression, anxiety, anger or loneliness

The **National Eating Disorders Association** also provides these statistics:

- 81% of 10-year-olds are afraid of being fat
- 46% of children aged nine to eleven 11 are “sometimes” or “very often” on diets
- Over half of teenage girls and nearly one-third of teenage boys use unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting and taking laxatives
- Around 10% of eating-disordered individuals that come to the attention of mental health professionals are male
- Girls who diet frequently are 12 times as likely to binge as girls who don’t diet
- The average American woman is 5’4” tall and weighs 140 lbs., while the average American model is 5’11” tall and weighs 117 lbs
- Most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women
- For females between the ages of 15 to 24, the mortality rate associated with anorexia nervosa is 12 times higher than the death rate of all other causes.

Types of Eating Disorders

Anorexia Nervosa

- Weight is at least 15% less than the normal healthy weight for height
- Characterized by not eating enough, exercising obsessively, and using forced vomiting or laxatives to lose weight

Bulimia Nervosa

- Individuals can have weight that is normal, or be overweight, even obese.

- Characterized by binge eating, consuming thousands of calories from foods that are often high in sugars, carbohydrates, and fat.
- After a binge, food is purged by inducing vomiting or by using a laxative. Binge cycles can be repeated daily or many times a week.

Health hazards of an eating disorder are numerous and serious. The impacts on the heart and circulatory system are:

- **Anorexia** – slow heart rate, low blood pressure, increased chance of heart failure
- **Bulimia** - irregular heartbeat, heart failure and death from chemical imbalances and loss of necessary minerals, especially potassium

Self-Image and the Media

The media images we are inundated with not only sell products and services, but promote a certain body image as well. Advertising images feature women who are young, tall, very slender to thin, have no or only minimal body fat, and who have a perfect complexion, fingernails and hair. Men are portrayed as young and tall, very muscular, lean and tanned, with no obvious body fat.

Media images don't directly cause eating disorders or enforce a body image that must be followed. Nevertheless media is a huge factor in forming the overall cultural matrix of our society and is therefore highly influential in determining what is perceived to be desirable in men and women.

The body image portrayed in the media is clearly and consistently one that over-emphasizes the importance of physical attractiveness and having the "right" shape, weight and body. The attempt to achieve an unrealistic ideal can contribute to the psychological and social causes of eating disorders, i.e., feelings of low self-esteem, inadequacy, depression, loneliness, and anxiety.

Learning how to understand and filter media messages can be very useful to children in constructing a healthy self-concept and body image. The National Eating Disorders Association suggests being a "critical viewer" of media by understanding:

- Media messages and images are NOT reality.
- Advertisers create an emotional experience to encourage viewers to buy or support a product or service.
- Viewers can choose what to think or believe about the message and the images represented.
- We can choose a filter that reinforces our self-esteem and body image, rather than the one presented in the media.

- Media influences are not limited to advertisements but include television programs, videos, movies, and pictures that accompany newspaper and magazine articles.

A **healthy body image** is fostered by knowing and practicing the following:

1. Body image and personal worth are NOT the same thing.
2. Strengthen personal recognition and appreciation of your qualities, skills, and talents.
3. Stay alert. Be aware of the influences on body image, whether from media or from peers.
4. Choose to filter media images. Recognize them for what they are.
5. Choose to be around people who support you for developing healthy habits and who recognize your talents and abilities.
6. Respect yourself and others by:
 - Practicing positive self-talk.
 - Diminishing negative self-talk about your appearance and body shape.
 - Giving positive messages to other girls and boys who don't meet the stereotypes for the perfect body image.
 - Using your refusal skills to disregard peer pressure to look like everyone else, listen to derogatory comments about yourself or others, or engage in behaviors that lead to eating disorders.

Vocabulary:

Self-concept
 Self-esteem
 Body Image
 Attitude
 Media
 Subjective
 Objective
 Value Judgment
 Influence
 Support
 Eating Disorder
 Anorexia nervosa
 Bulimia nervosa

Engage:

1. Have students read a portion of the Hans Christian Anderson story *The Ugly Duckling*. This story is in the public domain and can be found at these two websites:
 - Candlelight Stories <http://www.candlelightstories.com/StoryPage.asp>
 - Hans Christian Andersen http://hca.gilead.org.il/ugly_duc.html

2. Assign students to work in groups. Ask students to write about the duckling's **self-concept** and **body image**. Was it positive or negative? What influenced his image of himself? How did it change and why?
3. Discuss the results. Note on the board key ideas about body image and self-concept, as well as what influences them.

(Note to Teachers: While this story may seem a bit young for this age group, like most fairy tales it can be read with different levels of meaning. Your students can enjoy working with a familiar childhood tale in a new way!)

Explore:

1. Write the following vocabulary words on the board: **subjective**, **objective**, **value judgment**. Ask the students what the words mean and ask them to give an example of each.
2. Ask the students for examples in the Ugly Duckling story of a **subjective statement**, an **objective statement**, and a **value judgment** about the duckling.
3. Working individually, have each student write an objective description about themselves. Imagine they are scientists who are looking to describe in factual terms, without value judgment, what they observe about themselves.
4. This should be highly descriptive and objective (not negative, positive or evaluative) about:
 - Physical appearance: weight, height, hair and eye color, complexion, etc.
 - Skills, interests, and abilities, whether creative, athletic, hobby-oriented or interpersonal
 - Three recent accomplishments
5. Arrange the students in small groups of four or five to share their descriptions. Encourage the group to listen non-judgmentally and to minimize joking and teasing about what is shared. The teacher should visit and listen to at least one student in each group. If the class has an aide or parent available, assign that person to a group or two.
6. Bring the students back together as an entire class. Ask the students to share what it was like to think and write about themselves objectively.

Explain:

1. Ask: **“Where do we get our self-concept and our body image?”**
Draw an outline of a child on the board or on large easel paper. Draw multiple arrows coming towards the figure from all directions.

2. Ask: **“What influences how you think about yourself? Your body?”** Write each response by an arrow. Use this diagram to demonstrate that there are many influences that help us determine how we think about ourselves.
3. If any of the responses relate to the influence of the mass media, draw students’ attention to this. If not, ask the students if they think that television, movies or magazines have had any impact on them.
4. Ask: **“How does the media influence you? What do ads get us to do?”** (*Buy things.*) **“How do they do that?”** (*They create impressions.*) **“What kinds of impressions do they create?”** (*Possible answers: Having or using certain items will enable us to have fun, be popular, or be attractive; it is important for us to have that item; everyone else has one, etc.*)
5. Explore the types of media images that children see and the messages that are received from them. Have the students organize in groups and give each group a few magazines (children’s, teens, travel, health, men’s health, women’s health.) Have students examine the magazine ads and briefly analyze them. Ask each group to randomly pick the same number of ads (15 -20 or so) from their magazine. For illustrative purposes, remove the pictures from the magazines and group them together.
6. Study the ads and chart the results:
 - Kinds and frequency of products or services advertised
 - Numbers of male and female (adult or child) models
 - Objective descriptions of the models
 - The relationship of the model to the product/service
7. Students can finalize their information by creating bar graphs comparing products and models used, physical characteristics represented, etc. Draw conclusions about the media surveyed. What, if any, are the similarities among the media of the inclusion of images of males? Of females? Is there a prevalent body image being conveyed? Describe what that body image is.
8. Conduct a quick survey: Think about the adults you know (family, neighbors, group leaders, etc). Write down the names of five women and five men. Circle the names of the people who look like the people in those magazines. Do a hand-count survey of the class. How many students know ten people who fit the image? Nine people? Eight people? Continue through the numbers down to zero. Write the count on the board as you go through each number and do the math; have the students figure out the percentage of people they know that fit each image.

9. Ask: **“What other kinds of media influence us?”** (*Television, videos, movies, newspapers, etc.*)

Extend:

1. Brainstorm and discuss how popular body images influence our view of ourselves, how and what we eat, how we exercise, and the choices we make about what to buy, wear and look.
2. Ask: **“What happens when we don’t (or can’t) look like the people in the media?”** (*We may develop a negative self-concept and body image.*) **“What is a negative body image? What is a positive body image?”**
3. Have the students do a quick-write to compare and contrast how positive and negative body image are alike and different.
4. Ask: **“What are the effects of a positive body image? A negative body image?”**
5. One of the effects that can result from a negative body image is the development of an eating disorder. Ask: **“What is the definition of an eating disorder?”** (*An obsession with weight and food, and a distorted body image.*)
6. Invite students to share what they’ve heard about different types of eating disorders, their causes, and the effects they may have on the heart. After students share their knowledge have them read “Learning About Eating Disorders and Body Image” and the “Practical Steps” information sheet at the end of the lesson (**See Figure 1**). Students can also be given an assignment to explore this information on the internet at the following websites:
 - KidsHealth.org: <http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/>. Search: Kids and Eating Disorders, Body Image, and Right Weight for My Height
 - National Eating Disorders Association: www.NationalEatingDisorders.org - (search through the Information Index Tab)
7. Have students organize the information they’ve learned about in a graphic organizer. (A web or Mindmap format is useful. For information about graphic organizers or to download printable examples, go to www.edHelper.com.)

8. Label the center: **“Eating Disorders.”** Branch off with the following headings:

- **Definition**
- **Causes**
- **Types**
- **Heart and Circulatory Impact**
- **Personal Impressions**

Information about all subject headings can be found on the Information sheet, “Personal Impressions,” which encourages students to record their thoughts, opinions, and feelings about eating disorders.

9. Have the students share the results of their reading and organizing with the class as a whole. Draw the web on the board and ask the students to fill in the information to complete the web.

Evaluate: Group Activity

1. Have student groups make posters about creating a positive self-concept.
2. Ask the groups to brainstorm their answers to the following two questions.
 - **“How do people demonstrate a positive self-concept?”**
 - **“How can a negative self-concept (body image) be changed to a positive self-concept?”**
3. Have each group brainstorm specific ideas, focusing on actions and behaviors that demonstrate positive self-concepts. Create a poster to teach other students about helpful strategies for building positive self-images.
4. Give the students the following guidance (if needed):
 - **For Question #1:** Have students think about people they know (their own age or adults) who have a positive self-concept. What are some qualities, characteristics and actions these people exhibit that indicate a positive concept?
 - **For Question #2:** Students can respond with ideas about how we talk about ourselves to others, our personal hygiene and neatness, how we dress, our food and exercise choices, examples of positive messages we can use, acknowledgment of talents and abilities, recognizing character values, etc.

Evaluate: Individual Activity:

Have each student create a chart or table of the Healthy Body Image Practices. Down the left side of the table write the Practices (1 through 6 as well as 6a through 6d.) Opposite each practice ask the students to list one action (or behavior) that he/she can do to put that practice into action.

Alternative Individual Activity:

Have each student write an analysis explaining these concepts, their relationship to each other, and how the student perceives them in relationship to him/herself:

- Body image
- Self-concept
- Media Influence

Optional Enrichment Activity:

1. Research the following questions and prepare reports for the class:
 - **“What are examples of different standards of beauty around the world?”**
 - **“What do different countries or continents consider to be the ‘ideal’ female and male body?”**
2. Organize students to work together in groups. Divide parts (countries representative of varying cultures, continents) of the world up among the groups so that each one investigates a different area.
3. Substantial research can be done through the Internet as well as books, magazines and reference materials at the library. Pictures and information can be gathered and observations of physical characteristics (height, weight, dress, jewelry and other adornments, etc.) recorded. You may also wish to have students prepare and give presentations to the class.
4. At the conclusion of these studies, the class can prepare a comparative chart of the results, which determine the comparative factors (height, weight, body shape, etc) and organize them on one large (easel paper or large poster board) chart. Comparison factors can be listed on one side while the different countries (including the U.S.) are listed across the top.
5. Have the entire class draw conclusions about body image, “ideal” weights, etc. in this country as they relate to other body image concepts.

Additional Web Resources:

- National Institutes of Health-MedLine Plus:
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>

- U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services:
<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/>

Missouri Standards:

Health and Physical Education Frameworks:

I. Functions and Interrelationships of Systems

B. Social Systems

What All Students Should Know:

2. Family, friends, and cultures can influence personal health practices.

What All Students Should Be Able To Do:

- a. Evaluate ideas and perspectives regarding the influence friendships, peers, and acquaintances have on choices and behaviors during adolescence.

II. Health Maintenance and Enhancement

C. Consumer Health

What All Students Should Know:

3. Advertising techniques influence consumer decisions.

What All Students Should Be Able To Do:

- a. Use critical thinking skills to analyze marketing and advertising techniques.

Figure 1

Learning About Eating Disorders and Body Image

What is an eating disorder?

A leading medical organization, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (www.healthyminds.org), maintains that eating disorders are illnesses. People who have this illness have severe disturbances in their eating behaviors. They are obsessed with food and their body weight. They may also have a lot of difficulty in general with negative thoughts and emotions.

What causes an eating disorder?

The root causes of this problem are very complex. The National Eating Disorders Association addresses this question:

“People with eating disorders often use food and the control of food in an attempt to compensate for feelings and emotions that may otherwise seem over-whelming. Eating disorders are complex conditions that arise from a combination of long-standing behavioral, biological, emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and social factors.”

- www.NationalEatingDisorders.org

Some of those factors include:

Biological:

- Scientists think brain chemicals that control hunger, appetite and digestion may become unbalanced.
- Eating disorders may be related to heredity.

Social:

- We have cultural values that glorify “thinness” and having the “perfect body.”
- We have narrow definitions of beauty, where only specific body weights and shapes are considered to be acceptable.
- We may tend to value people more for their physical appearance than their inner qualities and character.

Interpersonal:

- People who have experienced these problems may be vulnerable to an eating disorder:
 - History of being teased or ridiculed based on size or weight
 - History of sexual or physical abuse
 - Troubled family and personal relationships

Psychological:

- People who have experienced these feelings may be vulnerable to an eating disorder:
 - Low self-esteem
 - Feelings of inadequacy or lack of control
 - Depression, anxiety, anger or loneliness

What kinds of eating disorders are there?

Anorexia Nervosa:

- Body weight is at least 15% less than the normal healthy weight for the person's height.
- Anorexia is characterized by a person who does not eat enough, exercises obsessively, and uses forced vomiting or laxatives to lose weight.

Bulimia Nervosa:

- Individuals can have weight that is normal, overweight or even obese.
- Bulimia is characterized by binge eating. Thousands of calories (often high in sugars, carbohydrates, and fat) are eaten.
- After a binge, food is purged by inducing vomiting or by using a laxative. Binge cycles can be daily or several times weekly.

How do eating disorders affect the heart?

Eating disorders can cause many very serious health problems to the heart and circulatory system:

- **Anorexia** - Slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and increases chance of heart failure
- **Bulimia** – Causes an irregular heartbeat or heart failure. Chemical imbalances and loss of necessary minerals, especially potassium, can occur, leading to death.

How are the cultural messages about body image created?

One of the biggest influences on cultural values comes through the media: advertisements, television, movies, videos, and athletics. The media images that we are inundated with are not only selling products and services but are promoting certain body images as well. Advertising often presents women who are young, tall, very slender to thin, have no or minimal body fat, and have a perfect complexion, fingernails and hair. Men are usually portrayed as young, tall, very muscular, lean and tanned, with no obvious body fat.

Media images don't directly cause eating disorders or enforce a body image that must be followed. But the body image portrayed in the media is clearly and

consistently one that over-emphasizes the importance of physical attractiveness and having the right shape, weight and perfect physique. The attempt to achieve an unrealistic ideal can contribute to the psychological and social causes of eating disorders (feelings of low self-esteem, inadequacy, depression, loneliness, and anxiety.)

My Body and My Self-Concept

How we feel about our body and its size, shape, weight, musculature, and abilities has a lot to do with how we feel about ourselves as a person, our self-concept. If we like how we look, we have a positive body image and self-concept. If we don't, our body image and self-concept will probably be negative.

How we look to others is often given very high priority. Sometimes we value what others think about our appearance more than what we think about ourselves. Trying to live up to an ideal shape or size because we think others consider it important can create feelings of low self-esteem, depression, and unhappiness with ourselves and our lives.

Practical Steps

1. I know that my body image and my personal worth are NOT the same thing.
2. I recognize and appreciate my qualities, skills, and talents.
3. I stay alert. I am aware of outside influences on my body image, whether from media or peers.
4. I choose to filter images from the media. I recognize them for what they are.
5. I choose to be around people who support me for developing healthy habits and who recognize my talents and abilities.
6. I respect myself and I respect others by:
 - Practicing positive self-talk
 - Choosing not to use negative self-talk about my appearance and body shape.
 - Giving positive messages to girls and boys who don't meet the expectations for perfect body image stereotypes.
 - Using my refusal skills to resist peer pressure to look like everyone else, listening to derogatory comments about myself or others, or engaging in behaviors that lead to eating disorders.

Did you know?

The National Eating Disorders Association provides the following information:

- 81% of 10-year-olds are **afraid** of being fat
- More than one-half of teenage girls and nearly one-third of teenage boys use unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting and taking laxatives
- Around ten percent of individuals with eating disorders that come to the attention of mental health professionals are male
- Although the average American woman is 5'4" tall and weighs 140 lbs, the average American **model** is 5'11" tall and weighs 117 lbs
- Most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women;