

FONDATION
JEUNES
EN TÊTE

MINI-GUIDES

TEENAGE BODY IMAGE

SPECIAL SCHOOL EDITION

CONTENTS

Introduction	03
PART 1: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BODY IMAGE	05
• What is body image?	06
• Why do we need to encourage young people to develop a positive body image?	07
• What signs should we look for in students?	09
PART 2: 4 KEY ACTIONS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE BODY IMAGE IN YOUR SCHOOL	11
• Action #1: Assess your own body image.	12
• Action #2: Establish rules to improve acceptance of body diversity in your classroom.	13
• Action #3: Promote the ideas of natural weight, intuitive eating and physical activity.	17
• Action #4: Focus on lifestyle habits, not weight.	19
PART 3: OUR ADVICE FOR ADDRESSING 11 PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS INVOLVING APPEARANCE WITH YOUR STUDENTS	21
• Situation 1: Bullying because of weight	22
• Situation 2: Student comments on their own weight	23
• Situation 3: Worrisome eating behaviours	25
• Situation 4: Conversations about appearance	25
• Situation 5: The desire to change their appearance	27
• Situation 6: Doubts about physical abilities	28
• Situation 7: Worrisome eating behaviours in a friend	28
• Situation 8: Making fun of an eating disorder	28
• Situation 9: Parental pressure about appearance	29
• Situation 10: Love and appearance	33
• Situation 11: The pressure of influencers on the body	33
RESOURCES	35

INTRODUCTION

ADOLESCENCE is a key moment in human development, but it is also a period of physical and psychological upheaval that can cause distress in some young people.

During this crucial phase, young people must constantly adapt to a new body image. In an image-conscious society where unattainable, retouched bodies are continually featured on social networks and reality shows, it can be even more difficult for some young people to develop a positive body image.

As a school employee, you play a central role in young people's lives and have the opportunity to positively impact your students.

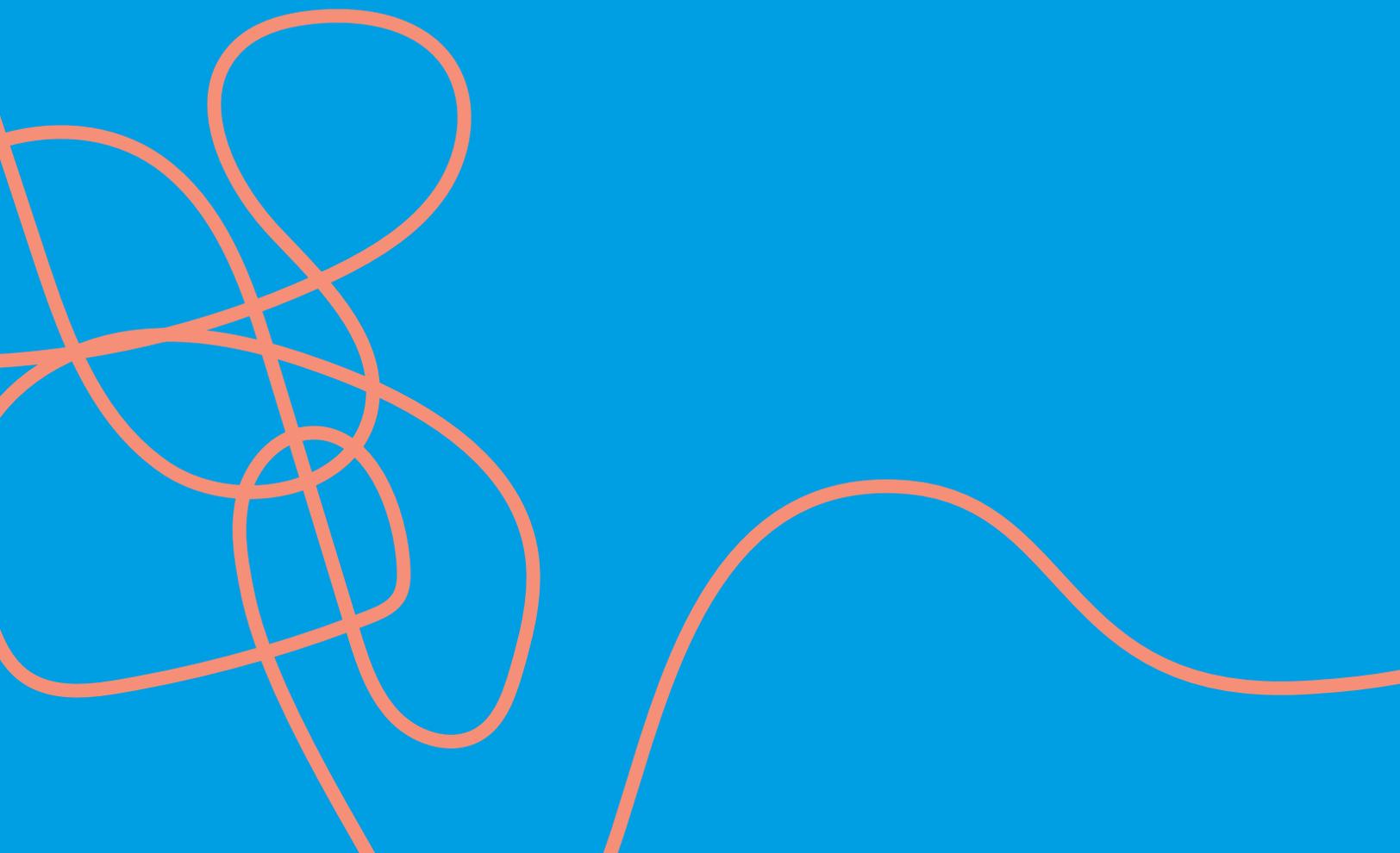
WITH THIS MINI-GUIDE, WE PROVIDE STEP-BY-STEP TOOLS TO HELP YOU:



- ➔ **better understand the foundations of a healthy body image.**
- ➔ **promote body acceptance in your school.**
- ➔ **respond appropriately to your students' questions and behaviours to help them live better with their bodies.**



PART 1:
**EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO
KNOW ABOUT BODY IMAGE**



WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

Body image is the **perception** young people have of their **own bodies**. It is the answers, positive or negative, that young people give to the following questions when they look at their bodies:



Every young person has a different perception of their body, based on their **thoughts**, **emotions** and **behaviours**.

A young person who has a negative body image will tend to:

- +** NOT ACCEPT THEIR BODY, rejecting it or wanting to change some parts of it
- +** SEE THEIR BODY IN PARTS (and not as a whole), with an emphasis on the less desired parts
- +** FEEL SHAME, guilt or hatred towards their body
- +** NOT RECOGNIZE AND NOT RESPECT THE NEEDS of their body
- +** TRY TO ACHIEVE A BODY THAT IS NOT THEIR OWN.

➔ **PLEASE NOTE** that a young person with a positive body image may also be dissatisfied with some aspects of their appearance, but this will be less of a factor in their perception of their body, unlike young people with a negative body image.

WHY DO WE NEED TO ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO DEVELOP A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE?

Did you know that around **55%** of teenagers are dissatisfied with their appearance? By helping your students maintain a positive body image, you'll have a positive impact on their mental and physical health.

A YOUNG PERSON WHO IS DISSATISFIED WITH THEIR BODY IS MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP:

- an unhealthy relationship with their body and with food;
- food-related concerns;
- weight-control behaviours;
- eating disorders;
- anxiety and avoidance;
- symptoms of depression;
- isolation;
- lower academic performance.

If you want to learn more about how body image develops and its impact on young people's well-being, listen to [our webcast](#) with psychoeducator and psychotherapist Marie-Michèle Ricard.



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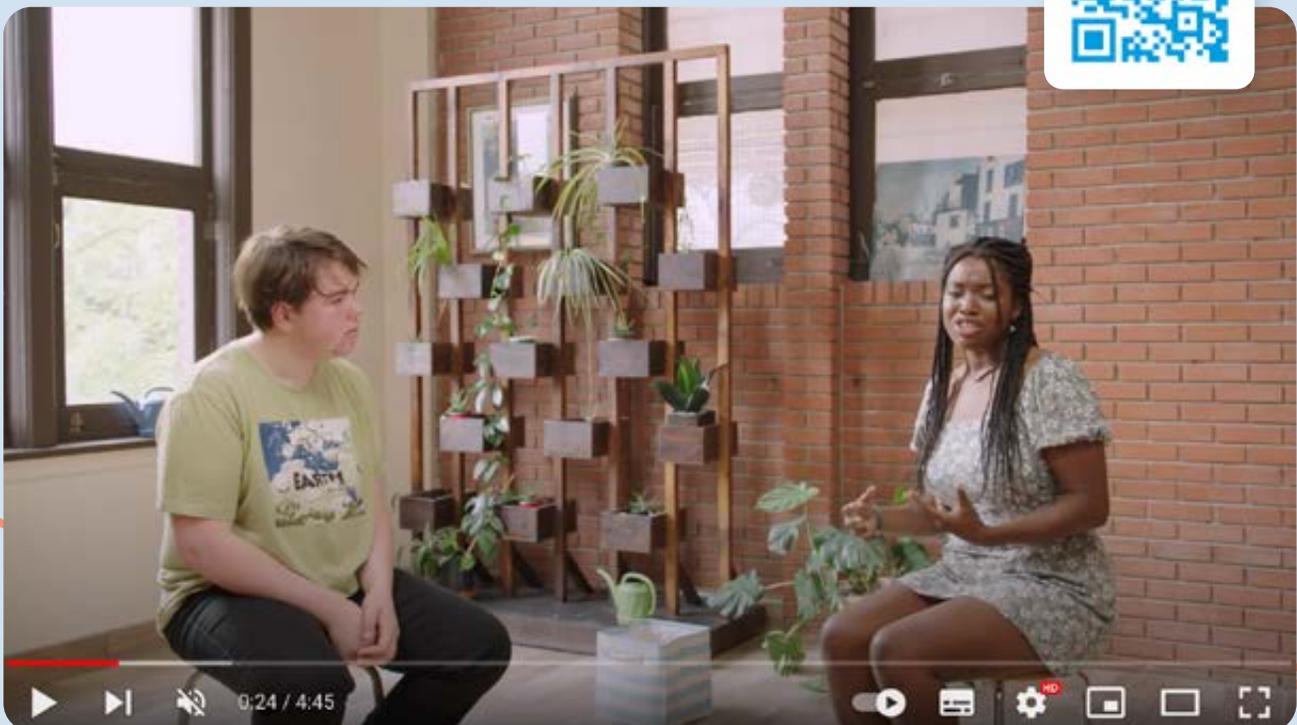
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WHAT SIGNS SHOULD WE LOOK FOR IN STUDENTS WHO HAVE A NEGATIVE BODY IMAGE?

THE TEENAGER...

- makes negative or critical comments about their body;
- may complain about gaining weight;
- seems preoccupied with their weight or appearance;
- talks about weight loss methods or products and may encourage their use;
- weighs themselves regularly, measures themselves or constantly looks in the mirror;
- feels unhappy with their body;
- may avoid certain activities or avoid wearing certain clothing because of their weight or appearance;
- develops an exercise routine that seems excessive or rigid;
- changes their diet to control their weight;
- may tend to isolate themselves and look sadder.

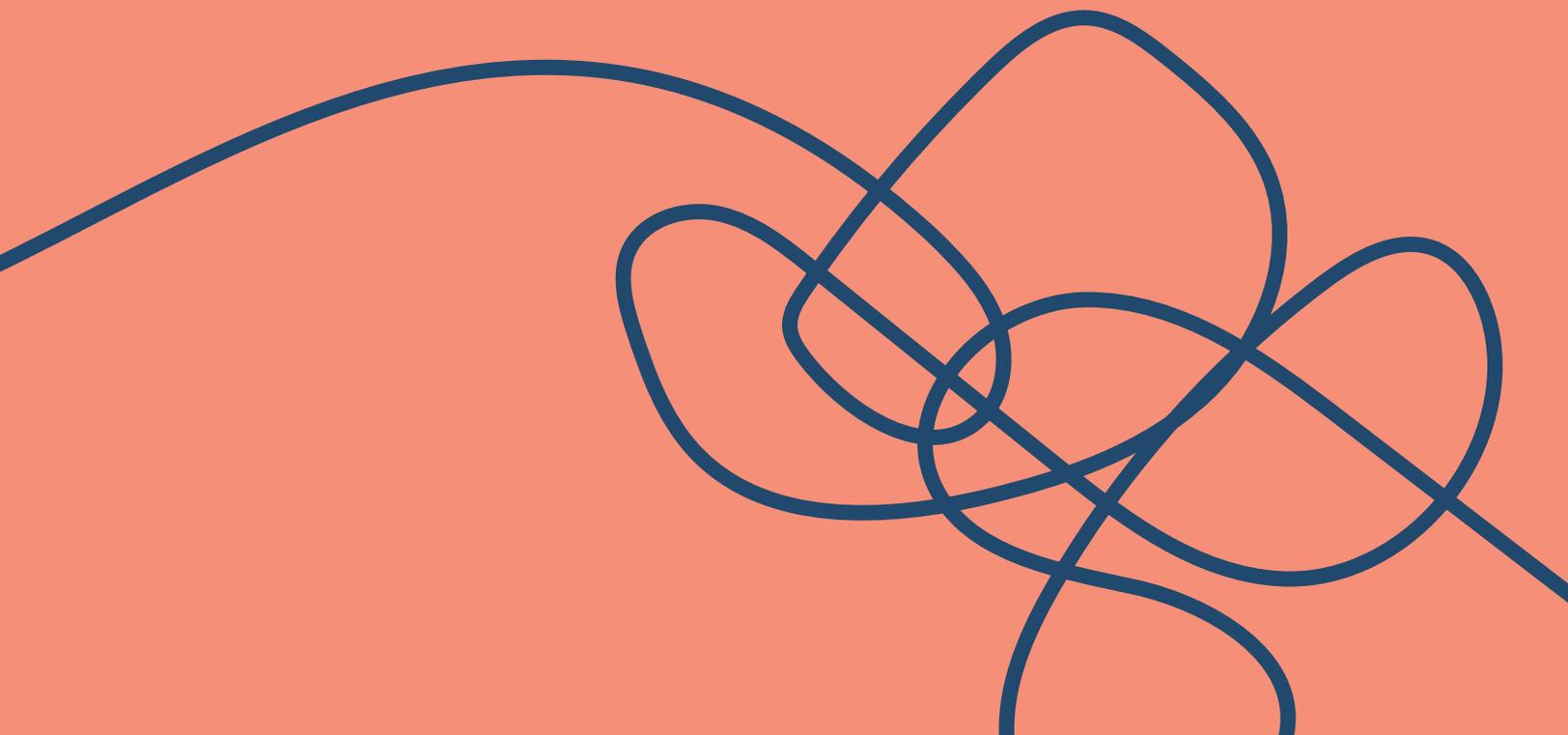
Listen to some young people's stories and a professional's advice in our [video](#) to help teenagers accept their bodies.





PART 2:

4 KEY ACTIONS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE BODY IMAGE IN YOUR SCHOOL



To help you establish a **true culture of body diversity acceptance in your school**, we have identified 4 important steps you can take. For maximum effectiveness, we recommend that you repeat them regularly.

ACTION #1 : **ASSESS YOUR OWN BODY IMAGE.**

As a teacher, you are an important person in your students' lives. Your own body image, your eating behaviours and the comments you make can have a big impact on how your students' body image develops. It has been shown that a person with a positive body image is also better able to respond appropriately to student concerns and issues related to appearance and weight.

For this reason, why not take a look at your own body image?

[Click here for resources](#)

-  **WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK IN THE MIRROR?**
-  **WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR WEIGHT?**
-  **WHAT ARE YOUR LIFESTYLE HABITS?**
-  **DO YOU ENJOY EATING?**
-  **DO YOU LISTEN TO YOUR BODY?**
-  **DO YOU RECOGNIZE YOUR PHYSICAL SENSATIONS?**
-  **DO YOU AVOID CERTAIN FOODS?**
-  **ARE YOU PHYSICALLY ACTIVE FOR FUN?**
-  **DO YOU COMMENT ON WEIGHT?**

ACTION #2 :**ESTABLISH RULES TO IMPROVE ACCEPTANCE OF BODY DIVERSITY IN YOUR CLASSROOM.**

Body diversity acceptance is a very important value that promotes mutual respect and a realistic representation of all bodies. It helps diminish the importance of a single standard of beauty by demonstrating and reminding us that human beings are diverse.

It is very useful to provide—or develop with students' help—a code of body diversity acceptance that lists certain rules.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE RULES COULD BE:

- ➔ **ALL BODIES ARE BEAUTIFUL;**
- ➔ **I DO NOT TOLERATE OR EXPRESS ANY NEGATIVE COMMENTS ABOUT APPEARANCE OR WEIGHT;**
- ➔ **I UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THAT ALL BODY SHAPES EXIST AND THAT THEY ARE ALL EQUALLY VALID;**
- ➔ **HUMAN BODIES ARE DIVERSE IN COLOUR, SIZE, SHAPE, HEIGHT AND ALL OTHER CHARACTERISTICS;**
- ➔ **EACH PERSON HAS THEIR OWN VALUE AND THEIR OWN UNIQUE BODY.**

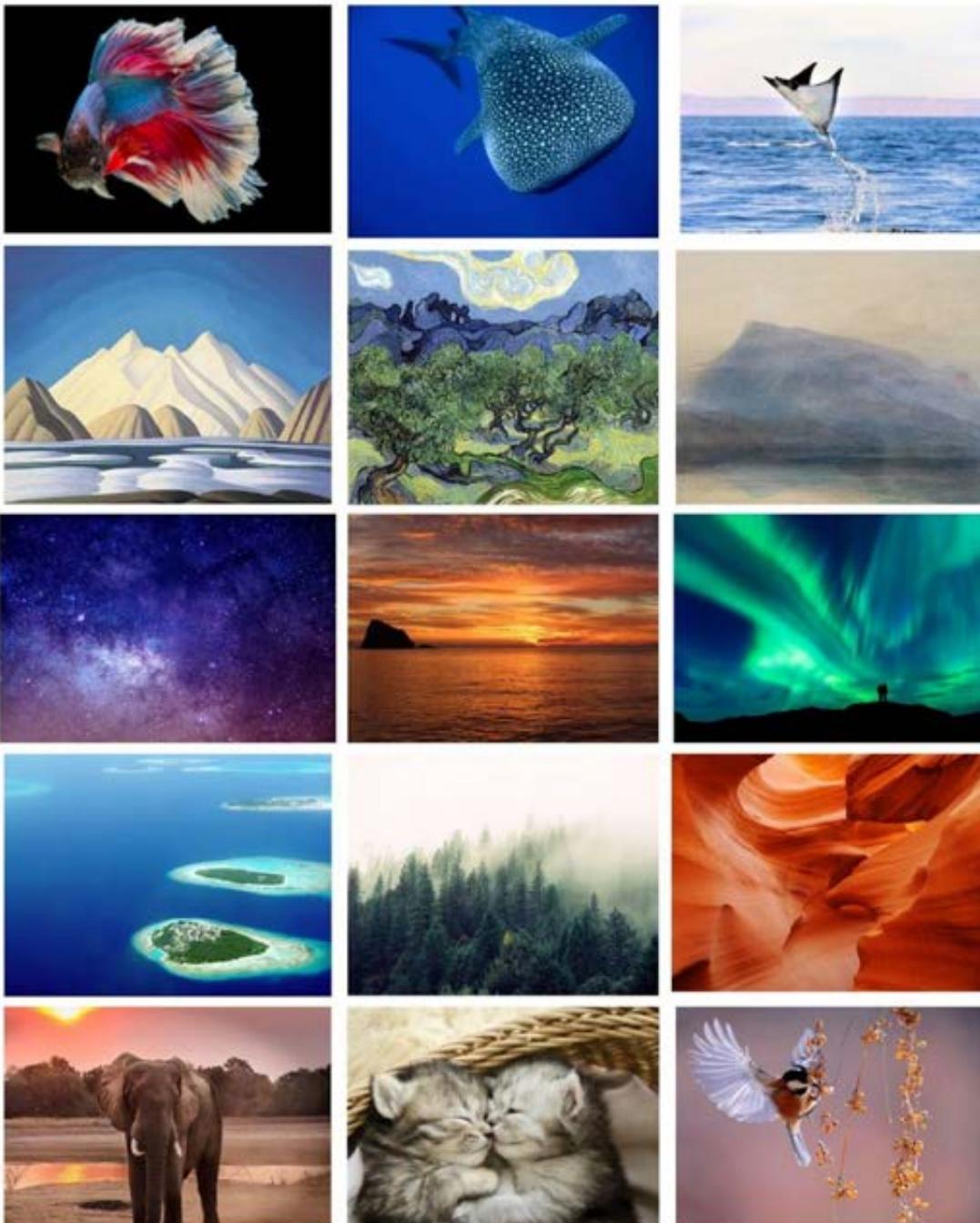
Don't hesitate to show them **videos** with real-life stories from young people and celebrities who have struggled with mental health issues related to body image.





It is also very important to use images that **show this diversity**. Avoid having only one body type in these images (e.g. always the same body shape) and choose several images that represent diversity, even if they are **non-gendered** and **not focused on appearance and the body**. These can illustrate **objects, places** or **specific themes**, and not specifically human beings.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES THAT YOU CAN PRINT AND SHARE WITH YOUR STUDENTS TO ILLUSTRATE DIVERSITY:







ACTION #3 :

PROMOTE THE IDEAS OF NATURAL WEIGHT, INTUITIVE EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

To help your students maintain a healthy relationship with their bodies, you can focus on 3 basic concepts that they can implement in their daily lives:

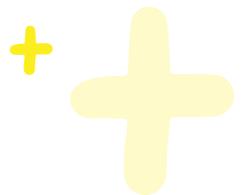
 **Natural weight**, which is our genetically programmed weight. It is impossible to know it in advance, but we reach it when our physical activity and our diet correspond to our needs. This weight naturally varies, but can become unbalanced due to certain factors, such as repeated weight control through dieting. It is helpful to remind students that they have very little control over their weight. Their power lies more in their behaviour and in body acceptance.

 **Intuitive eating**, a nutritional practice that allows a person to adequately meet their body's needs:

- eating when hungry;
- stopping when full;
- respecting their food preferences;
- not excluding any food categories.

Intuitive eating also includes moving for pleasure, accepting your body without trying to change it and learning to successfully manage your emotions.

 **Regular physical activity, done for pleasure.**
It is therefore recommended to focus on an activity that is accessible and enjoyable, rather than on a goal based on appearance or calories to be burned.





ACTION #4 : **FOCUS ON LIFESTYLE HABITS, NOT WEIGHT.**

Many misconceptions directly link lifestyle habits to weight. While lifestyle habits are a behaviour that can be addressed, weight cannot be controlled.

Therefore, it is wrong to think that a weight that is higher than the one that society has determined to be the norm is synonymous with poor lifestyle habits. Try to reframe these ideas by reminding your students of what natural weight is and what a healthy lifestyle habit is.

The objective of the last point is to take care of one's physical and mental health by doing 15 minutes of physical activity per day, for example, or by eating in a way that meets one's bodily needs, and not to develop behaviours that will control one's weight or appearance.

Weight is the result of several internal and external factors specific to the individual and cannot be the target of behaviour modification.







PART 3:
**SOME ANSWERS TO YOUR
STUDENTS' QUESTIONS/
BEHAVIOURS REGARDING
APPEARANCE**

➔ **NOTICE:** This section is intended to provide teachers with guidelines for attitudes and behaviours to adopt in certain situations that may arise in the school. However, for many of them, more comprehensive intervention is required. Collaboration with the school counsellor, the principal and parents is recommended.

SITUATION 1 :

**I witness an episode of bullying over a student's weight.
How should I react?**

1. Intervene directly by recognizing the bullying and stopping it immediately.
2. Validate the experience of the young person who is the victim and treat them with empathy and sensitivity.
3. Refer to the school counsellors for intervention with the bully, the group and/or the victim. This intervention should target the inappropriate behaviour and seek a healing action. All schools have a bullying prevention and intervention plan, and each school has a responsibility to ensure that its environment is safe for everyone.
4. Consistently demonstrate zero tolerance for any form of bullying (whether weight-related or not).

It is worth remembering that ignoring the behaviour is not a practice to be encouraged. Bullying must stop and concrete action must be taken.



SITUATION 2 :

A student approaches me and says that they think they are too fat.
How should I respond?

1. Thank the teenager for their trust.
2. Validate their experience by asking them how they feel (what emotion they are experiencing) and what “being fat” means to them.
3. Explain that body fat is a normal part of the human body.
4. Adopt a message of body diversity ([see Action #2](#)).

Don't hesitate to show them the advice on our website, which includes [videos](#) with stories from young people who have faced body image problems.





SITUATION 3 :

I notice some concerning eating behaviours in my student.

1. Name the observed behaviour (for example, “I see that you’re not eating your lunch” or “I see that you’re only eating half your snack”) and ask what’s going on.
2. Check the reason for the behaviour or its purpose (they don’t like their meal, they’re trying to control their weight or appearance, they don’t have lunch money, etc.).
3. Validate their experience by asking them how they feel (what emotion they are experiencing). If the purpose is dietary control, clarify the association they make between the act of eating and weight gain.
4. Remind them that it is important to eat to give their body the energy it needs to live, to feel pleasure, to be able to concentrate in class and to manage their emotions.
5. Remind them that the important thing is to like what they eat and to meet their basic needs.
6. Explain that our bodies know what to do with food and that we have a genetically determined weight ([see Action #3](#)).
7. Refer to the school counsellor so that a more complete assessment can be made. Collaboration with parents is strongly recommended.

SITUATION 4 : Conversations about weight and appearance.

I witness conversations about appearance. Should I intervene?

For example, if colleagues or students congratulate each other on weight loss in the hallway.

Conversations about weight and appearance are pervasive in interpersonal exchanges. While it is desirable to eliminate or minimize them, it is unrealistic to think that they can be stopped entirely. Nevertheless, it is helpful to know that these conversations perpetuate concerns about appearance and weight. For young (and not-so-young) people who are more vulnerable to developing body dissatisfaction, these conversations can be major triggers.

“Le poids ? Sans commentaire” Week (“Fat Talk Free Week”), which takes place every November ([organized by ÉquiLibre](#)), is a good reminder that these conversations are harmful.

Having said that, when there are **negative** comments about appearance, intervention is required. This is when it is helpful to have a body diversity acceptance code in the classroom that has rules written down, such as zero tolerance on negative comments related to weight and appearance.



SITUATION 5 :

A young person comes to me and asks me how to lose weight effectively/ quickly or asks me how to gain muscle mass quickly because they think they are too skinny. What should I say?

1. Validate the existence of appearance-related pressure.
2. Explain that weight control or weight modification behaviours are ineffective in the long term, can be harmful to the body and promote body disconnection.
3. Encourage them to recognize and respond to their bodily needs (hunger, fullness, the need to move, fatigue, various illnesses).
4. Adopt a message of body diversity ([Action #2](#)).

WEIGHT-LOSS DIETS:

ARE THEY MORE DANGEROUS THAN EFFECTIVE?

Here is more information from the book *De l'insatisfaction à l'acceptation corporelle - Développer une relation plus positive avec son corps (From Dissatisfaction to Body Acceptance - Developing a More Positive Relationship with Your Body)* by psychoeducator and psychotherapist Marie-Michèle Ricard.

"Several studies have shown it for a long time: weight loss diets don't work in the long term. In fact, 95% of people will regain the weight lost or more within five years, unless they maintain and increase their dietary restrictions (in other words, they'll be on a diet for life)."

(ASPQ, 2015).

"[...] [Weight loss] diets can have many adverse physical and psychological consequences.

[... In the short term, these include] digestive problems, fatigue, low blood pressure, headaches or dizziness, intolerance to cold, muscle cramps and even hair loss. [...]

Psychologically, the risks are trouble concentrating and paying attention, symptoms of depression and anxiety, increased stress, irritability and altered moods, decreased self-esteem, continued body dissatisfaction and increased concerns about weight and eating, social isolation and an increased risk of eating disorders."

SITUATION 6 :

A young person doubts their physical ability to complete an athletic activity. What can I do to encourage them?

1. A physical activity is undertaken primarily because it is enjoyable. It's possible that the physical activity is new, and that the young person is anxious about it. Their anxiety could be related to being watched by others, being teased or not performing.
2. Remind them that bodies need to move, and that it is normal and necessary to develop various physical skills (these skills are developed, they are not innate).
3. Encourage them to give themselves a chance to try various forms of physical activity and different sports, and remind them that the goal is fun, not performance.

SITUATION 7 :

A student tells me that a friend is exhibiting problematic eating behaviours and that the friend's family doesn't know about it. How should I respond/what should I do?

1. Thank the young person for their trust and instinct to talk to you about it.
2. Validate that it can be upsetting for a friend to observe these behaviours and that no one should keep such a secret.
3. Notify the school counsellor so that they can intervene and communicate with the parents.

SITUATION 8 :

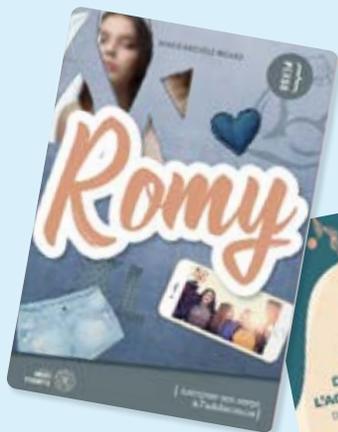
Students are making fun of another student who is dealing with an eating disorder, saying things like "they're trying to get attention," "they should just stop eating so much/should just eat more," "it's their own fault," etc. What should I say?

1. Recognize and stop this form of bullying immediately.
2. Remind (or inform) them that an eating disorder is an illness and is accompanied by distress, that the illness is not something the student can control and that the student is not to blame.
3. [See Situation 1.](#)

SITUATION 9 :

A student talks about parental/family pressure regarding their body image (for example, my parent thinks I'm too skinny/too fat). How should I talk with the young person/parent? How should I refer the matter?

1. Thank the young person for their trust.
2. Validate the existence of appearance-related pressure.
3. Adopt a message related to body diversity.
4. Suggest a meeting (by phone or in person) with the parents to inform them of the risks related to pressure about weight and appearance or suggest that the school counsellor take care of it. Don't hesitate to share [the advice](#) on our website with them.
5. Refer them to the school counsellor, their family physician, or other professionals who specialize in this area.
6. You can recommend books like [Romy, accepter son corps à l'adolescence](#) ([Romy: Accepting Your Body During Your Teenage Years](#)) and [De l'insatisfaction à l'acceptation corporelle - Développer une relation plus positive avec son corps](#) ([From Dissatisfaction to Body Acceptance - Developing a More Positive Relationship with Your Body](#)).





WHY ARE COMMENTS ABOUT PHYSICAL APPEARANCE HARMFUL TO A YOUNG PERSON?

Here is more information from the book [De l'insatisfaction à l'acceptation corporelle – Développer une relation plus positive avec son corps \(From Dissatisfaction to Body Acceptance – Developing a More Positive Relationship with Your Body\)](#) by psychoeducator and psychotherapist Marie-Michèle Ricard.



“During childhood and adolescence, certain people play an important role in the development of body image. Through various experiences, all significant people (such as parents, grandparents and educators) can become valuable allies, or they can make the child or adolescent vulnerable (Rodgers and Chabrol, 2009) [...].

First of all, their own body image, eating behaviours and comments about their weight model behaviours for the young person (Ericksen et al., 2003). By making comments or engaging in various behaviours that demonstrate how important appearance is to them, they are teaching the child that their body is an object that must correspond as closely as possible to social norms and that it can be modified.

They can also teach the child that weight can be controlled through external factors (e.g. by practicing food control behaviours or physical activity). Then there are comments and actions that are aimed directly at young people, such as pressure to be thin, restrictive eating behaviours at home to make them lose weight, direct comments about young people’s weight or that of others (Blodgett Salafia & Gondoli, 2011) and comparing them to their siblings. All of these experiences send the same message: your weight and/or your body is not acceptable and must meet a certain standard for you to be happy, healthy, or worthy of love from yourself or others.”





SITUATION 10 :

A student tells me that they will never be able to have a romantic relationship because of their weight.

1. Thank the young person for their trust.
2. Validate the existence of appearance-related pressure.
3. Adopt a message related to body diversity ([Action #2](#)).
4. Focus on the young person's self-esteem by emphasizing their personal strengths, skills and abilities.

SITUATION 11 :

Students admire an influencer because of their looks. How can I make young people aware that comparing themselves to social media personalities is not good for them?

1. Normalize the act of admiring and idealizing a public figure.
2. Educate students about how the various images they see are often modified.
3. Remind them that the images are part of the single standard of beauty, which is associated with great pressure, and that the images were manipulated before they were taken (choice of clothes, makeup, posing, lighting, etc.) and after (Photoshop and company).
Watching Dove's "[Evolution](#)" video may be helpful.
4. Adopt a message related to body diversity ([Action #2](#)).



→ RESOURCES:



→ ANEB QUÉBEC

www.anebquebec.com/en

→ BIEN AVEC MON CORPS

www.bienavecmoncorps.com

→ ÉQUILIBRE

www.equilibre.ca

→ GROSSOPHOBIE.CA, INFOS & RÉFÉRENCE

www.grossophobie.ca

→ ORDRES DES PSYCHOÉDUCATEURS ET PSYCHOÉDUCATRICES DU QUÉBEC

www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/english

→ ORDRE DES PSYCHOLOGUES DU QUÉBEC

www.ordrepsy.qc.ca

→ ORDRE PROFESSIONNEL DES DIÉTÉTISTES DU QUÉBEC

<https://opdq.org/>

→ ORDRE PROFESSIONNEL DES SEXOLOGUES DU QUÉBEC

<https://opsq.org/>

BOOKS FOR FURTHER READING

HERE ARE SOME OF THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES TO GET YOU STARTED:



Bergeron, M. (2019). **La vie en gros, regard sur la société et le poids.** (*Living Large: A Look at Society and Weight.*) Éditions Somme toute.



Bernier, E. (2020). **Grosse, et puis ?** (*Fat, But So What?*) Éditions Trécarré.



Collard, G.L. (2021). **Corps Rebelle - Réflexions sur la grossophobie.** (*Rebellious Body - Reflections on Fatphobia.*) Québec Amérique.



Germain, V. (2015). **Clara : les désordres alimentaires à l'adolescence.** (*Clara: Adolescent Eating Disorders.*) Éditions Midi Trente.



Gravel, K. (2021). **De la culture des diètes à l'alimentation intuitive - Réflexions pour manger en paix et apprécier ses cuisses.** (*From Diet Culture to Intuitive Eating - Thoughts on Eating in Peace and Liking Your Thighs.*) KO Éditions.



Ricard, M.-M. (2021). **De l'insatisfaction à l'acceptation corporelle - Développer une relation plus positive avec son corps.** (*From Dissatisfaction to Body Acceptance - Developing a More Positive Relationship with Your Body.*) Éditions JFD



Ricard, M.-M. (2021). **Romy : accepter son corps à l'adolescence.** (*Romy: Accepting Your Body During Your Teenage Years.*) Éditions Midi Trente.



Sanders, J. (2019). **Cher corps, je t'aime.** (*Love Your Body.*) Éditions CrackBoom !



Sénécal, C. (2018). **Ton poids, on s'en balance.** (*We Don't Care How Much You Weigh.*) Éditions de l'Homme.

DISCOVER ALL OUR TOOLS TO HELP YOUR YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE



YOU WILL ALSO FIND LESSON PLANS AND INFO SHEETS

to help your students accept their bodies.



WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND PSYCHOEDUCATOR MARIE-MICHÈLE RICARD

for writing this mini-guide.

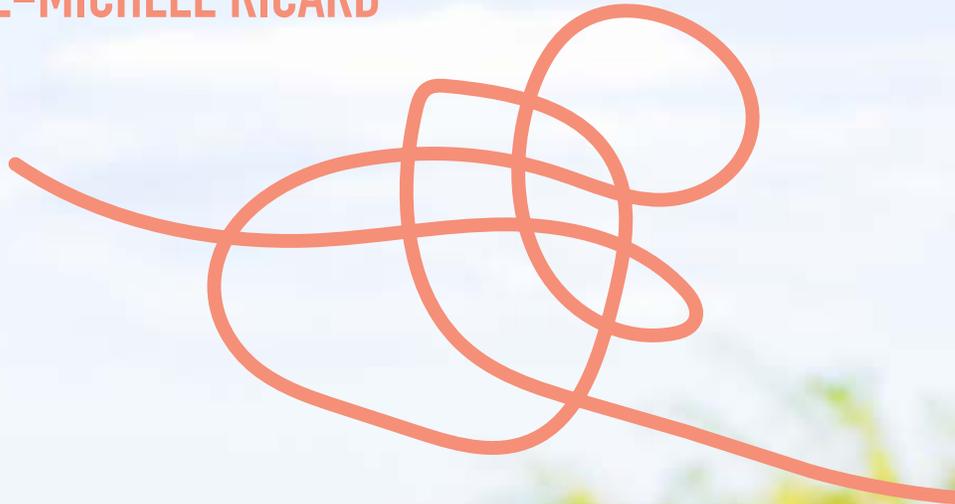
Information from: Ricard, M.-M. (2021).

De l'insatisfaction à l'acceptation corporelle – Développer une relation plus positive avec son corps. (From Dissatisfaction to Body Acceptance – Developing a More Positive Relationship with Your Body.) Éditions JFD

and

Ricard, M.-M. (2021).

Romy, accepter son corps à l'adolescence. (Romy: Accepting Your Body During Your Teenage Years.) Éditions Midi Trente.



SINCERE THANKS TO OUR PARTNER:



Les Éditions Midi trente : practical books and friendly intervention tools for overcoming difficulties and stimulating the potential of children and adults.

DON'T HESITATE TO CHECK OUT THEIR BOOKS AND TOOLS!

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